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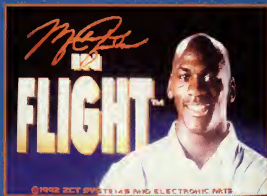
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SCENES**



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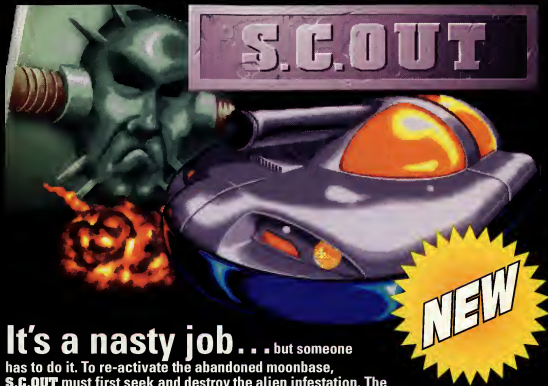
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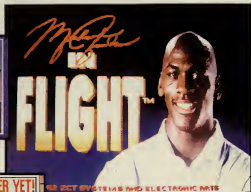
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EDITOR'S NOTES

One of the first things you noticed about this issue is our special bonus magazine, *The First Decade of Computer Gaming*. The story of how the computer game market developed from little more than a cottage industry into a multimillion-dollar business is truly amazing. Selby Bateman and Lance Elko interviewed many of the people who have been part of this industry since its inception, and we think you'll find the stories and anecdotes insightful, funny, and fascinating.

PC game publishers are constantly exploiting high-end technology, converting games originally released in floppy-disk format to CD-ROM to provide more animation and graphics coupled with digitized speech and a CD-quality soundtrack. Tom McDonald's roundup of CD-ROM conversions on page 26 can help you decide which of these upgraded versions are the best values.

These CD-ROM releases are unquestionably beautiful to see and hear. Many gamers, however, either can't afford these new multimedia spectacles, or lack the hardware needed to run them (and don't have the bucks for an upgrade). But there are bargains to be had, as Jeff Seiken reports on page 16. We sent him out on a shopping spree with \$100 in hand, and he returned with games that are not only affordable, but which also run great on a 286.

We enjoy keeping you up to date on the latest games, but we want your input in order for us to cover the topics important to you. So please take the time to send us your thoughts and feelings on the current crop of releases and the gaming industry in general — we really do listen.

Stephen Poole
Editor

NOTE TO SUBSCRIBERS:

We're moving our annual *PC Entertainment Buyer's Guide* in order to include all of the top games for the holiday season — it will be published directly after this issue (Nov/Dec) rather than before it. If your subscription label indicates an expiration date of B/C 92 (*Buyer's Guide* 1992), your sixth and final issue will actually be this one (N/D 92). If, however, your label indicates an expiration date of N/D 1992, you'll be receiving the *Buyer's Guide* as your sixth and final issue. The *Buyer's Guide* will feature comprehensive coverage of all the top games of 1992, plus informative features on sound cards, multimedia upgrade kits, and much more.

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Impressions

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CASINO CRAPS

Villa Crespo is taking an innovative approach to software marketing with its Coffee Break Series. By taking modules from their acclaimed casino simulations — *Dr. Wong's Jacks+ Video Poker* from Stanford Wong's Video Poker, for example, and *Amarillo Slim's 7-Card Stud* from Amarillo Slim Dealer's Choice — Villa Crespo can offer good gaming software at budget rates. In addition, the company plans to distribute the Coffee Break games through new outlets such as supermarkets, drug stores, and other unconventional (for software) retail shops.

But the Coffee Break Series doesn't consist solely of modules of previously released titles. *Casino Craps* is one of several titles created specifically for the Coffee Break series, and while it doesn't have the replayability of a top-of-the-line Villa Crespo casino simulation, it's a great way to sharpen your dice skills.

If you don't play or aren't interested in craps, *Casino Craps* probably won't hook you on the game: The spartan graphics are merely functional and sound support (for Sound



Blaster only) is limited to a snippet of digitized casino sounds. Of course, you can't expect a visual and aural feast in a package costing \$12.95.

For players who like craps, however, *Casino Craps* delivers a fast-paced game that will get you ready for the real thing in Las Vegas or Atlantic City. And if you've wanted to play craps but found the rules too complicated, *Casino Craps'* online help system can at least get you acquainted with the basics. I've asked people to explain craps to me for years, but it was only after playing *Casino Craps* (and won \$300!) that I knew what was going on.

Casino Craps won't make you feel like you're in a casino, but it's a great way to get in some bones action — without costing you an arm and a leg at either the checkout counter or a real craps table.

— Stephen Poole



READY FOR LETTERS

Grab a kid from 3 to 5 and come visit the Rabbits in their cozy house in Hoppy Hollow. In this new release from The Learning Company, you can explore the Music Pond, decorate a bedroom, play in the shower, and even help Grandma and Grandpa work. Whether your youngsters are in the mood for free-form play or specific goal-based education, the house in Hoppy Hollow is an entertaining place to be, full of bright colors, enchanting music, chatty rabbits,



and interesting locales to explore.

Each of the six activities is carefully chosen to fit the "happy home" theme as well as relate to a specific learning skill. There are games where you match shapes and objects, practice letter recognition, and work with words dealing with location and comparison such as under, over, less, and bigger. And the Rabbit family actually talks: help Grandma Rabbit cook, for example, and she asks for each ingredient by name, by image, and by written word. This subtle three-fold reading reinforcement is very effective.

Other games are equally engaging. A visit to the bathroom reveals a room

with several hot spots (including a toilet that flushes), and Reader Rabbit in the tub. Match the letter shapes to their names (both spoken and written) and Reader Rabbit draws pictures on the tub wall. And you can take a trip to the pond where you'll find musical animals playing hide and seek. They'll gladly perform five different tunes in three different versions, one instrument at a time.

For more sophisticated youngsters, there's the family photo album. Reader Rabbit will give you a verbal and visual hint about the relationships between the members of the family and the picture (Grandpa has the biggest fish, I have less ice cream than Grandma, and so on). Click the correct spot on the picture to match the image to the phrase, and you're rewarded with a lively tune and another picture to complete.

Ready for Letters offers great educational value, attractively presented and full of surprises. It's a warm-hearted program sure to appeal to the youngest game players in your house.

— Leslie Eiser



Paladin II

The cover art depicts a dramatic scene set within a dark, stone-walled dungeon. In the center, a large, dark, horned creature with glowing yellow eyes and a flaming mouth is breathing fire. In the foreground, a knight in full plate armor, including a helmet with a visor, is crouched and aiming a longbow. To the right, a figure in a dark, hooded robe stands holding a staff that emits a bright, glowing blue and white light. The scene is lit with a strong orange and red glow from the fire and the staff's light. The overall atmosphere is one of intense action and fantasy.

OMNITREND
SOFTWARE

Impressions

OPERATION SKYMASTER

Mega fortress was one of the surprise hits of 1991, combining elements of flight-sims and strategy games in one mission-oriented package. Stuffed full of high-tech weaponry and relying more on resource management than quick joystick reflexes, *Three-Sixty's* game offered a new dimension in computerized air warfare.

In the original *Mega fortress*, you could fly your retooled and amazingly stealthy Stratofortress through test missions in Nevada, Persian Gulf scenarios, and a mission re-creating the final scene



from *Flight of the Old Dog*, the Dale Brown novel upon which the game is based. The first mission disk, *Operation Sledgehammer*, featured two more scenarios (Libya and Iran) featuring 25 more missions. Now, *Operation SkyMaster* offers three additional scenarios adapted from Dale Brown's novel *Sky Master*.

As with *Operation Sledgehammer*, *Operation SkyMaster* focuses on hypothetical scenarios extrapolated from current political situations — the Chinese have invaded the Philippines and North Korea. The American government refuses to officially intervene in either conflict, so the Mega fortress is flying alone, with its only outside support being refueling.

In the Philippine scenario,

the Chinese have taken the U.S.'s abandoned Clark Air Force Base and are making a push to take Manila and the rest of the island. Eleven missions are designed to take out naval forces (including new Chinese destroyers and frigates), inland SAM sights, a key bridge, airfields, and supply depots. The first mission is deceptively simple: a naval turkey shoot made easy with long-range SLAMs. With the addition of land targets, SAMs, and heavy air cover, the missions get increasingly difficult.

China is also up to no good in North Korea, where they are backing Kim Il-Sung in a strike against South Korea. All this is made particularly sticky by North Korea's development of ROGAN (Radio Object-Guided Airburst Nuclear) technology, the final result being a new, unstable type of fusion device not unlike the neutron bomb. Aside from ten missions to neutralize North Korean land and sea, the Mega fortress must fly the "Dragonslayer Incident" to destroy the ROGAN development sights. Even friendly aircraft don't know about the Dragonslayer mission, so you must avoid allied patrols and pick up secret weapons in the Republic of Russia. New weapons are limited to the Dragonslayer mission.

The 22 missions are nicely diversified land and sea operations, mixing up the targets and opposition enough to keep each one interesting. The story behind each set of missions is well-developed and not improbable, making this a worthy addition for heavy-bomber fans hungry for new targets.

— T. Liam McDonald

ON TARGET: MOONLIGHT ARTILLERY CHALLENGE

As the name implies, *Villa Crespo's* "Coffee Break Series" offers inexpensive programs designed to provide a satisfying gaming experience in a small window of time. While most of the other games in the series are modules taken from the realistic casino simulations *Villa Crespo* is famous for, *On Target* provides a quick, easy, bang-bang contest between two entrenched artillery positions separated by mountainous terrain which changes with each new game.

Players take turns lobbing shells at one another, trying either to score a direct hit or to blow up the opponent's gun crew. The interface could hardly be simpler: set the trajectory and velocity of your shell (don't forget to allow for



finds the range by its fourth or fifth shot (unless you set the machine's skill at the lowest level, which is a pretty wimpy thing to do).

Wind is obviously a crucial factor, and you can play with no wind, steady wind, or variable wind. Once you've gotten the hang of the game, try the variable setting for the most challenge — the wind direction and velocity changes randomly on that setting,

sometimes with every round. You can also choose whether or not to view the flight path of your shells; as you might expect, it's a lot easier to adjust your shots when the arcs remain visible.

Variations of this game have been floating around for years as shareware, so many readers will already be

familiar with the concept. *Villa Crespo* hasn't done much to dress things up — just added color and shading to the graphics — so if you already have an earlier version, *On Target* will be redundant.

It's hard to imagine anyone getting absorbed in this game for hours at a time, but when played in the 15- to 20-minute sessions it's designed for, *On Target* is surprisingly enjoyable.

— William R. Trotter



windage), fire the gun, then watch the arc of your shell. Each player keeps adjusting fire until the opponent's gun is destroyed, then another round begins.

Each set consists of ten rounds — just about perfect "coffee break" length indeed — with the computer keeping a running score. Playing against a human opponent is decidedly more fun than playing against the computer; no matter how bizarre the terrain may be, the computer always

Discovery

IN THE STEPS OF COLUMBUS

In *Discovery*, *you* are the master explorer and adventurer. Set Sail into the distance, in search of new lands; Explore new worlds; Pirates are everywhere - be prepared for sea battles; Create Cities - fell trees, build farms, forts, warehouses, schools; Trade the produce from your new world to buy new ships; Fight the other nations trying to establish their empire.

In 1492 Columbus discovered America - for God, Gold and Glory!

500 years later this is your chance to discover a new world!



FEATURES:

6 New Worlds to Discover

Piracy - mutiny & battles

Land & Sea combat

Simple point and click interface

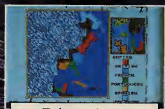
8 ship types; 4 maps

5 competing nations

YOUR CHANCE TO DISCOVER AMERICA!



Animated people develop buildings all by themselves



Watch your empire grow



You will need to fight off pirates and more!

Impressions

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OPERATION: FIGHTING TIGER FOR FALCON 3.0

Veteran *Falcon 3.0* pilots eager for a new fight can climb back in the cockpit to fly in three new campaigns in Spectrum HoloByte's *Falcon 3.0 Operation: Fighting Tiger*.

Building on the sophisticated, hi-tech play of *Falcon 3.0*, the *Fighting Tiger* expansion and upgrade disk adds three theaters of conflict, new weapons, and new missions, including anti-ship sorties. Beyond these enhancements, *Fighting Tiger* adds political factors to sharpen the realism and raise the stakes of the player's role in the game.

Depending on the degree of U.S. involvement in the theater, strict rules of engagement dictate what actions a pilot may take — attack, defend, or just try to chase away the enemy. It's those political considerations which make the Kurile Islands campaign in *Operation: Fighting Tiger* a thinking player's game. Shoot first, and you may escalate the war and fly home to a court martial.

While the basic game is otherwise unchanged, veteran *Falcon* pilots will appreciate the fine-tuning and enhancements, along with additional weapons, targets and enemy aircraft.

All three hypothetical campaigns are plausible scenarios: Japan and Russia squaring off over the Kurile Islands;

India and Pakistan battling for the Kashmir province; and an invasion of South Korea from the North.

Visually, the most welcome enhancement is in the night graphics, with a darker palette providing the background for brilliantly lit airfields, cities, and stars. It's too bad night sorties come only once a day; the action is a real blast.

A few new commands and views also enhance play. Players can order wingmen to



spread out or tighten up in formation. Lights on runways help guide the pilot on landing. And the padlock view now tracks incoming missiles.

The scenarios offer a host of new missions, giving you the chance to attack ships, trains, and amphibious and airborne units. New opposition planes include the MiG-31, Mirage 2000, and the UMF, an experimental Russian fighter. You're also given a new plane to fly — the FSX, a Japanese-modified version of the *Falcon*.

Operation: Fighting Tiger expands and enhances an already proven winner. Computer pilots who've already won the skies over Panama, Kuwait and Israel in *Falcon 3.0* should get ready to sign up for another tour.

— Lee Buchanan

NEW MATH BLASTER PLUS FOR WINDOWS

With 4 games, 6 levels, and 5 subjects, *New Math Blaster Plus* from Davidson offers something for students from 6 to 12. There are standard drills for addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division; a section on fractions, decimals, and percentages; a problem editor; and timed and untimed activities to play.

Rocket Launcher and Trash Zapper are drills which focus on accuracy, not speed. The goal of Rocket Launcher is to build a rocket by answering problems correctly. Solve 30 problems and the colorful Blasternaut will march to his ship and take off. In Trash Zapper, you solve problems to gain points which you spend in the space arcade, where cleaning up the universe is the name of the game.

Math Blaster, the only timed activity, combines high-speed action with standard drill. Start by figuring out which of four space stations displays the correct answer to the given math problem, then fly the Blasternaut into that station, avoiding contact with any of the floating objects that fill the screen. It's easy to do at the lower levels, but increasing amounts of space junk at the higher levels turns the game into a piloting exercise rather than a pure math drill.

Number Recycler, the



problem solving activity, is the most interesting of the bunch. Instead of simply covering math facts, this game requires planning to make a top score. Columns of numbers are separated by operands (+, -, *, and /, and =). The goal is to create five correct equations using the



pieces supplied. Because numbers are "zapped" if not used in their turn, figuring out which pieces are most useful has to be done before play begins.

As a Windows 3.1-compatible product, *New Math Blaster Plus* has incorporated pull-down menus and mouse support, and prints certificates using Windows printer drivers. And as a revision of an award-winning DOS and Macintosh product, no new ground is broken. The program looks and plays just like its earlier versions, but with Windows all the rage these days this highly regarded chestnut may reach even more kids in its new format.

— Leslie Eiser



DON'T GET MAD... GET EVEN!



Watch with pride as your warriors move into intricate formations (HIGH RESOLUTION mode IBM PC only).



The game is full of sumptuous graphics.

Your Chance to get your own back! Conquest of Japan gives you five cities, each with money to hire armies - it is up to you to buy the right soldiers, and direct your armies to conquer Honshu, Japan's main island! In a truly epic production, you are both the general, planning campaigns, and the army commander, directing troops within each battle. All battles are played out in real time, with your soldiers moving into formation in fantastic, colourful animation! You can become as involved as you like - from watching progress, to instructing individual men if you wish to! You can even choose to play each battle in Hi Res (386/25 machines or better recommended) or faster Low Res.

FEATURES:

- Miniature-style war simulation
- Cities located differently each game
- Choice of authentic troop formations
- Simple to play
- Your chance to conquer Japan!!

CONQUEST OF JAPAN



Impressions

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GEMFIRE



Once upon a time, the continent of Ishmeria was united under the rule of a wise king whose powers derived from a jewel-studded crown called Gemfire. When the crown passed to an evil king, it was used to oppress the people until a princess took the magical gems from the crown and hid them throughout Ishmeria.

When this new Koei game begins, Ishmeria is divided into 30 provinces ruled by five noble families. Assuming command of one of these clans, the player must strive to regain control of all the gems by conquering or subverting all provinces under control of rival clans. Armies consist of the usual groups of archers, infantry, and cavalry, but powerful monsters, sorcerers, and supernatural beings are also available at various times and places.

While defending and preparing to attack, the player must also tend to internal development: improving defenses, developing agriculture and trade, sending and receiving diplomatic missions, etc.

If you think this sounds

similar to virtually every other Koei strategy game, you're right. The Nintendo version of *Gemfire*, which preceded this PC release by several months, holds a certain charm for novice gamers or precocious youngsters.

But what audience is Koei aiming for by releasing this game — unchanged from the Nintendo version except for finer-grained graphics — in the PC format? Not that many ten-year-olds have computers, and adult gamers will find *Gemfire* an insult to their intelligence: the role-playing elements are superficial, and every single battle follows the same basic formula. Once you've figured out what's what, it's almost impossible *not* to win, and a dreary sense of pointlessness settles over the whole game.

Since I began reviewing PC games, I've consistently



found myself enthusiastically supporting Koei's products. But *Gemfire* — at best a mildly entertaining game on the Nintendo — is about as banal and trite as a PC game can be.

— William R. Trotter

TOUR OF DUTY — DO 335 PFEIL



The skies over World War II Europe just got a little more dangerous with the appearance of the Do 335 Pfeil, a fast and deadly addition to the Luftwaffe.

The Do 335 expansion module, the fourth for *SWOTL*, brings to life one of the Luftwaffe's most radical aircraft designs. Two prop engines — one in the nose and the other on the tail — powered the Do-335 to a top speed of 474 mph, making it the fastest piston-engined fighter ever built. Not only could the Pfeil chase down just about anything in the skies of WWII, but it also had the ability to greet the enemy with some impressive firepower, thanks to a pair of 15mm cannons and a 30mm cannon.

Historians don't think the Do 335 actually saw action in the war, but the combination of speed and firepower would have made it a deadly air foe. Not surprisingly, that blend also makes it a lot of fun for PC pilots as well.

In this simulation, the Do 335 can take on the role of fighter interceptor, bomber escort, or fighter-bomber. The game provides several hypothetical "historical" missions to test the plane's capabilities in each role. Custom missions

allow you to fly against the Pfeil in any of the Allied aircraft, or design missions of your own. There's also a tour of duty option lets you try to stay alive for 50 or 60 missions.

Intercepting B-17s is where the Do 335 really shines. The big cannons really chew up the bombers, and the push-pull tandem props get you away in a hurry. If you're willing to take a few .50 caliber rounds from the B-17's gunners, the Do 335 can send a Flying Fortress down in one pass.

The Pfeil also provides a stern test for the U.S. fighters. Though not as agile as a P-51 or as tough as a P-47, the Do



335's sheer speed, endurance, and lethal firepower make it a dangerous opponent.

One small gripe: It's a shame that you can't oppose this plane while flying a tour of duty in the other aircraft. Like the other expansion disks for *SWOTL*, you can only fly against the Do 335 in custom missions.

— Lee Buchanan

THE DARK HALF

Capstone's latest movie tie-in game, *The Dark Half*, is based on the ill-fated George Romero film adaptation of Stephen King's bestseller. The game centers on a mainstream writer named Thad Beaumont, who also writes gritty suspense novels under the pseudonym George Stark. A sleaze named Fred Clawson learns that Beaumont is actually Stark, and threatens to let the world know unless Beaumont pays up.

Beaumont makes the announcement himself, saying that Stark is "dead" and that he'll no longer write under that name. A mock funeral is held for Stark, but he's not too happy about being "killed" by Thad. A string of violent murders ensue, with all the evidence pointing to Beaumont as the culprit. The goal of the game is to prove Thad's innocence. It's a good premise, but it's destroyed by incompetent execution.

For one thing, the graphics are uninspiring, looking as though they were created using a 12-color box of Crayolas instead of a 256-color palette. Though some screens are almost average, the game world they create is drab and lifeless.

The interface — structured as a typewriter — provides no default action setting. To examine everything in a scene, for example, you must click on "look," then click on an object, then back to "look,"



then on another object, and so forth. More elements of bad design can be seen in Thad's living room, where the only way to leave is by walking "into" a cabinet; a closeup screen which has four directional arrows that are never needed; and the constant repetition of dialogue options which you've already chosen.

The dialogue tree is designed in such a way that if you don't choose *exactly* the right responses in *exactly* the right order — particularly during the frequent police interrogations — you'll find yourself kicked out to DOS with your only memory being a brief "Game Over" screen. The most normal responses are often wrong, and will end the game.

In fact, you need to make silly choices to get anywhere in *The Dark Half*. From removing incriminating evidence from a crime scene to lighting up crushed cigarette butts to help Thad write, the game actions lack purpose. All the events seem so random, but the design dictates that things can only be done one way. Miss that way — easy to do when actions make so little sense — and it's curtains. *The Dark Half* punishes logical thinking, and is certainly more work than pleasure.

— T. Liam McDonald

TRISTAN

Long before video games, there was pinball. Three generations of Americans grew up loving those garish, hulking, flashing, ringing, thumping, glass-encased behemoths from Bally and Gottlieb. They had names like "Fireball," "Hula-Hula," and "Queen of Diamonds," with tantalizing pin-up girls painted on their back-glass panels. When the playfield action was hot and the flippers were goin' your way, playing them was almost as good as rock and roll.

Then came *Pong*, the first mega-hit video game, followed soon after by *Pac Man*; video

popular features of those Gottlieb, Bally, and Williams classics, and presents them in clean, bright, super VGA (or regular VGA) graphics.

Tristan has been around quite a while for the Macintosh — indeed, it was one of the all-time best-selling entertainment programs for that format. Now it debuts on the PC platform, with all of its virtues intact. The Enter key serves as the plunger, the two shift keys are used for flippers, and you can "nudge" the playing field by thumping the space bar (don't thump it too hard, though — this baby tilts

just like the real thing). The mass, weight, and inertia of a real pinball are all simulated with gratifying realism. All the classic pinball features are here: multiple balls, jackpots, surprise bonuses, score multipliers —



you name it.

Pinball fans will find *Tristan* about as intuitive as breathing, but Amtek has included a manual section on pinball fundamentals that should help turn a novice into an expert in short order. Installation is easy and the documentation excellent.

There are other, fancier, pinball simulations on the market, but none that captures the charm of those Golden Age machines with such loving fidelity. *Tristan* is a delight.

— William R. Trotter



MENTAL MATH GAMES

This new release is more than a drill-and-practice program decked out with all the latest bells and whistles. It's an outstandingly well-orchestrated attempt to get kids to practice basic arithmetic, and it succeeds marvelously.

At the core of *Mental Math Games*, designed by the Waterford Institute and distributed by Broderbund, are 355 levels of addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division problems. Each level addresses a different skill, with minimum requirements for both speed and accuracy at each level ensuring that students must improve if they want to move up.

But it isn't just the many levels of practice, the outstanding VGA graphics, the incredible sound effects, or the adorable animation sequences that make *Mental Math Games* extraordinary. The overall appeal of this product for kids is greater than the sum of its parts — each of the five games offers something unique, some good reason to want to go back and play it again.

First, there's *The Challenge*. This "do a little drill, get only a tiny bit of the reward" game keeps students doing problems in an attempt to see all of a three-minute animated video. This is a really tough job — you must meet the mini-



mums at every level to see the very end!

Interested in arcade action? *Math Match* has great sound effects, while *Tip-a-Duck* offers a carnival flavor. For real excitement, try the *Maze*. Deceptively simple at the lowest levels, the task in this monster of a game is to lead a mouse, a spaceship, a



submarine, and a biplane through mazes created by traps and treasures. Since movement is controlled by constantly changing math problems located on direction arrows, speed and accuracy are critical. Getting to the final reward, the Big Cheese, is so tough that most adults would find it frustrating. Youngsters just find it exhilarating.

Mental Math Games is entertaining, intriguing, and educational. It offers the sort of drill and practice routines that youngsters look forward to rather than dreading — and that's one of the highest compliments you can pay educational software.

— Leslie Eiser

TEXAS HOLD'EM POKER FOR WINDOWS

Card games are perfect for Windows. It's easy to hop right into a game of solitaire, blackjack, or poker, play a few hands, then jump back to another application.

To date, most card games for Windows, however, have been pretty simple affairs. They look good and they're easy enough to play, but many are awfully skimpy when it comes to strategy. You might get a brief rundown on the rules, but that's about it.

Not so with *Texas Hold'em Poker for Windows*. Iconwin Software Simulations has put a lot of care into making its Windows card game as complete as possible, from the highly detailed instruction manual to the numerous options for customizing the game to your liking.

Texas Hold'em is similar to other varieties of Hold'em — you try to create the best five-card hand using "private" cards (the cards you're dealt) and community cards. After receiving two cards face down, there's a betting round, then three community cards are laid face up in the middle of the table. There's another round of bets, another card is played in the middle, another round of bets, followed by the final community card and a final betting round.

The instruction manual is incredibly thorough and



serves as a great tutorial, but it's hampered by redundancy: You might be told four times on one page that you shouldn't play a bad hand, or that your position at the table should determine your betting strategy. It's nice that the strategies are explained, but one reminder is enough.

Once you're familiar with this poker variation, you'll appreciate all the extra features in *Texas Hold'em*. Card backs, game speed, and player styles are adjustable, and there are toggles for antes, house drops (a set amount the house receives from each pot to cover the overhead for the game), and hints for the best play.

But perhaps the most useful option is "Duplicate Hold'em." The computer plays, say, ten hands, then you play the same ten. If the computer wins more than you, it's time to study your hold'em techniques.

The only drawback with *Texas Hold'em* is obvious from the name: this poker variation is all you get. Nevertheless, poker fanatics will definitely want to add this one to their software collection.

— Stephen Poole



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BARGAIN BIN



CLASSICS—

LOAD & GO FOR A LITTLE DOUGH

JEFF SEIKEN

On the basis of dollars spent per hours of enjoyment received, computer games are probably one of the best entertainment buys around. But regardless of how you rationalize the expense, there's no escaping the fact that new games often cost a bundle. Moreover, after years of remaining seemingly impervious to inflation, they're growing more expensive, too.

The reason for the escalation in prices is simple. Production costs have ballooned due to the larger design teams and longer development times needed to turn out today's multimedia extravaganzas. As a result, the \$40 game is fast going the way of the XT computer. Most new releases now fall into the \$60 to \$80 range, and the first title to break the \$100 barrier can't be very far away.

On top of that, the latest crop of games also requires more high-powered — and

hence higher-priced — hardware than ever. Is it any wonder that gamers on a budget are beginning to feel like they're caught between a rock and a hard drive?

But there is a saving grace: the short shelf-life of computer games. When sales of a title start falling off, it's discounted like day-old bread at the supermarket. The markdowns can be substantial, with games that once commanded a premium price often going for less than you might pay for a hint book.

To give the budget-minded among you a better idea of the great buys to be had, *PC Entertainment* recently dispatched me on a bargain-hunting expedition down the aisles of the major software chains and through the pages of several mail-order catalogues. I started off with \$100 in hand; I returned seven games richer and six dollars under budget. Here's what I was able to bring home with that C-note.



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Patton Strikes Back

(Broderbund)

This war game is startling proof of just how quickly some titles are marked for clearance. The ink was barely dry on all of the raves it had received in the computer press (it was winner of *PC Entertainment's* War Game of the Year for 1991) when I spotted it at Egghead Software with its price slashed to \$14.99.

Designed by Chris Crawford, one of the grizzled veterans of the computer game industry, *Patton* is his bid to make war games palatable to the masses. Hence, user-friendliness is the order of the day. As much as possible, the game tries to convey information graphically, with multi-shaped icons and simplified displays rather than masses of numbers and data. The program also throws in lots of extras to enrich the gaming experience, such as battle reports accompanied by digitized sound effects and authentic newsreel footage.

The tricky thing about trying to create a war game with crossover appeal is that you risk satisfying neither camp. Crawford, however, avoids this trap. With *Patton Strikes Back*, he offers the casual player a painless introduction to the pleasures of simulation gaming. Admittedly, the game may not please the hardcore crowd at the opposite end of the continuum who demand realism at any price. But for \$15, it's hard to feel shortchanged no matter what your tastes.



NFL Pro League Football

(Micro Sports)

Some computer games are becoming more and more like cars: every year there's a new model available. Such is the case with *NFL Pro League Football*. The 1991 version had been on the market for only a matter of months before *Micro Sports* started unloading copies at rock-bottom rates to make way for an enhanced 1992 edition. I discovered the game at Babbages for \$10, a whopping \$70 less than its normal retail price. (If only car dealers discounted their older models as much!)

Pro League Football has earned a well-deserved reputation as the thinking-man's football simulation. With 198 plays to choose from, the game gives you ample opportunity to outsmart your opponent at the line of scrimmage. And if you prefer a more macro approach to the sport, you can draw up a game plan in advance and then relax on the sidelines while the computer zips through the contest in quick-play mode. Finally, *Pro League Football* is licensed by the NFL, meaning it comes with the rosters of real NFL teams rather than the ersatz players found in many of its competitors.

With the release of the 1992 edition, the 1991 version would seem destined for early retirement, but there's still reason to consider grabbing a copy. It remains a fine football simulation in its own right and, if you're really taken with it, you can always upgrade to the new version for an additional \$29.95. Even counting your original \$10 investment, you'll still save \$20 off the 1992 edition's retail price of \$59.95. Now that's a bargain any way you look at it!



Sword of the Samurai

(MicroProse)

A game that seems lackluster at \$50 or \$60 can take on a whole new cast at a lower price: the less your investment, the less of a payoff you're willing to demand. And that's exactly why I had a much easier time appreciating *Sword of the Samurai* when I paid only \$9 for it, courtesy of the mail-order house Chips & Bits (800-753-4263).

Sword of the Samurai follows in the tradition of *Pirates*, presenting a mix of arcade, adventure, and battle sequences, all tied together with a role-playing thread. However, play proceeds along much more rigid lines than *Pirates* and, in my mind, this is the game's undoing. Instead of giving you free rein to pursue your own destiny, *Sword of the Samurai* forces you to adopt an almost passive stance, biding your time and awaiting your lord's summons to action. Perhaps it re-creates the culture of the samurai warrior a bit too well.

But even if the game doesn't win a permanent place on your hard drive, it still delivers plenty of entertainment before its welcome starts to wear thin. The Japanese-style artwork and music evoke the Far Eastern flavor of the subject to rich effect, and the choreography of the dueling routines is splendid. And when you look at in the light of its \$9 price, *Sword of the Samurai* glitters like pure gold.

Grave Yardage

(Activision)

Because of their steep price tags, PC games aren't usually bought on impulse. But for \$14.50 — the amount I paid for *Grave Yardage* through the mail order closeout specialist Compust (805-544-6616) — most people can

afford to indulge themselves a little. And this game has indulgence written all over it.

Its premise is a hoot — or perhaps I should say a howl! *Grave Yardage* pits an assortment of goblins, ghouls, and other ghasties against one another in a gridiron grudge match that makes the real sport of football seem tamer than a game of dominoes. For instance, points are gained not only by scoring touchdowns, but also by beating opposing players



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KONAMI



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senseless. Obviously, subtlety counts for little in *Grave Yardage*.

But strategy counts for a lot, and *Grave Yardage* is surprisingly challenging despite its outlandish appearance. As in real football, you call various offensive and defensive plays, and make appropriate substitutions. Each player type from dwarf to zombie is rated in seven different categories, and the coach who makes best use of his personnel will definitely gain an edge.

Unfortunately, the EGA graphics don't do justice to the game's concept, the animation is choppy, and the program's bleating sound effects (there's no sound board support) may have you recoiling from your computer in real horror. But *Grave Yardage* executes its ideas with humor and style, a combination of qualities desirable in computer games at any price.

Operation Wolf (Taito)

Another \$14.50 pick-up from Compust, *Operation Wolf* falls into the same category of indulgence as *Grave Yardage*. Usually I give arcade games a wide berth, but at this price I was willing to experiment. Although my experience with *Operation Wolf* by no means made me an arcade fan, I certainly had fun while giving my reflexes a thorough workout.

If you think arcade games are simple-minded affairs, *Operation Wolf* won't exactly alter your opinion. The instructions run, oh, about 25 words: Move the joystick to aim, press one button to fire your machine gun and the other to launch a grenade.

The object of *Operation Wolf* is to rescue civilians held hostage by South American terrorists. To win, you have to survive six progressively difficult missions. To date, I have yet to make it through the third mission, but who cares? In this kind of game, the play's the thing.

What gives *Operation Wolf* its special kick are the graphics. While the landscape scrolls across the screen in standard arcade style, the bad guys appear at a wide range of distances from you—some are in the background, others are at medium range, and some pop up right in your face with their guns blazing. If the true measure of an arcade game is its degree of addictiveness, then this one should carry a warning from the Surgeon General. After every failed mission, *Operation Wolf* will have you gritting your teeth, flexing your fingers, and promising yourself, "just one more round."

Gold of the Americas (SSG)

This game was ahead of its time. Released in 1989, it appeared far too early to cash in on any of the publicity surrounding the Columbus quinquicentennial this year. It also predated SSG's popular *Warlords* and thus didn't benefit from the exposure the company gained with that game. Instead, debuting with little fanfare, *Gold of the Americas* created a few ripples of interest and then sank out of sight. But, luckily enough, Compust has located some copies and is selling them for \$16.50.

Gold of the Americas centers around the exploration and exploitation of the New World. Game play spans some three centuries divided into 30 ten-year turns, with each player representing a major European power trying to carve out a colonial empire. In covering such a huge swath of time, the program does a marvelous job of replicating the ebb and flow of history. Some countries, such

as Spain, start off strong and steadily lose vitality, while others, like England, don't emerge as major players on the colonial scene until a hundred years or more have passed. Colonies that grow particularly strong and prosperous may even break away from the mother country and form an independent nation a la the United States.

The game itself is relatively uncomplicated and moves swiftly despite the large number of turns. The quick and easy pace makes *Gold of the Americas* ideal for players who want a historically-minded strategy game that's tough to win but not too taxing to play.

Star Saga: Two (MasterPlay)

Most games that turn up in the bargain bin are either once popular titles whose heyday has passed or second-rate software that was never worth much anyway. But if you search diligently enough, you'll occasionally run across an overlooked gem like *Star Saga: Two*.

Originally published by MasterPlay, *Star Saga* had the misfortune of being distributed by Cinemaware. When Cinemaware went under, *Star Saga* was dragged down with it. But like *Gold of the Americas*, the game has since resurfaced at Compust, which bought

out Cinemaware's entire inventory. The game now retails for \$14.50, but quantities are limited.

Star Saga: Two is built around a game system that is at once innovative and old-fashioned. In many ways, it plays like a paper-and-pencil role-playing game, albeit with the computer acting as moderator. Each turn, the computer processes your orders and then refers you to one or more numbered passages in the 14 different booklets included with the game. These booklets comprise some 700 pages of text overall, making *Star Saga: Two* in effect (if not in substance) one of the weightiest computer games ever published.

The game accommodates up to six people at a time, as long as everyone involved doesn't mind playing musical chairs in front of the keyboard. But this isn't as much of a problem as it sounds; you'll usually spend the dead-time between turns consulting the booklets and then plotting your next move. Also, since players are competing with the game than with each other, kibitzing is perfectly acceptable. In fact, *Star Saga: Two* is about as good a party game as you're likely to find in computer format.

The plot follows classic space-opera lines, replete with a wise-cracking computer and mysterious alien menace. However, the crisp, colorful prose lifts *Star Saga: Two* far above other computer games in the genre. The quality and sheer quantity of the writing combine to give *Star Saga: Two* the texture of an interactive novel. With no sound or graphics to speak of, the game may seem like a complete anachronism. But in these days when multimedia is the byword, *Star Saga: Two* serves as the best reminder yet of the undiminished power of the printed word.

GP

(The price and availability of all games mentioned in this article are subject to change. In most cases, supplies are limited.)



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HI-TECH HOOPS



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SCENES WITH

SCENES WITH

MICHAEL

MICHAEL

JORDAN

JORDAN

IN FLIGHT

IN FLIGHT

LANCE ELKO

Any product with Michael Jordan's name attached is a guaranteed success. But most savvy PC game players have learned from experience that the most prestigious license or endorsement does not necessarily make an outstanding game. We've all been burned by "Big Name, Little Game" products. While *Michael Jordan in Flight* is still a couple of months away from release, what we've seen thus far is an ambitious, cutting-edge game with all the earmarks of being a potential blockbuster. Using a variety of advanced software development technologies, some in unique combination, *Jordan* is blazing a new trail in the sports simulation category.

During a recent trip to Electronic Arts, we had a chance to see *Jordan* in the works and to get an early look at how the game plays. Even at first glance, *Jordan* is impressive. Six digitized players — one of them Jordan — engage in a three-on-three game as your viewing angle, like the lens of a court-side camera, moves fluidly around the action, adjusting to provide the optimal perspective. Against a jet-black background, the players perform all the moves you'd see in any pro game — jump shots, blocks, fouls, steals, slams, reverse layups, and so on. But *Jordan in Flight* is not an NBA sim. It's modeled on a lightly publicized but highly organized three-on-three hoops tournament that's



been played around the country in recent years. Jordan (who has a clause in his Bulls' contract to permit him to play at this level) is on a team based in his home state of North Carolina, competing against squads from Detroit, Venice (California), and other hot spots around the country.

FROM COCKPIT TO COURTSIDE

When designer Mike Suarez first conceived of the kind of basketball game he wanted to do, he imagined an "on the court" affair with a TV broadcast feel, one with video images of real hoopsters rather than drawn and animated images. Suarez decided that a combination of digitized video and the technology used in creating industrial flight simulators was what he needed. Suarez contacted Greg Zumwalt, president of Tulsa-based ZCT Systems Group, a company that designs software for training commercial airline pilots. The collaboration resulted in a proprietary technology — dubbed Video-Sim — that EA and ZCT are using in *Jordan*. EA has indicated that they'll employ this technology in future games.

Electronic Arts' first Jordan game, *Jordan vs. Bird: One on One*, was developed with a



WORKING SESSION: Electronic Arts spent several days at a Chicago studio filming every Jordan move. At top are designer Mike Suarez (left) with executive producer Don Traeger and Michael Jordan

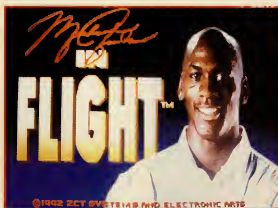
great deal of design input from Michael; in fact, he worked on the game with Don Traeger, executive producer of *In Flight*. To develop the video footage that would be the basis of *In Flight*, Traeger and an EA film crew spent days in a Chicago studio, filming Jordan running, dribbling, shooting, jamming — every conceivable aspect of his game. For the other players in the game, EA filmed a variety of college players with a broad array of playing styles, body shapes, and sizes.

When it came time to work on game design, Traeger and company sat down with Jordan and went through page after page of basketball plays. "He diagrammed them for us — some from the Bulls, some from his three-on-three experiences,"

says Traeger, "and it gives the play calling in the game a lot more depth." Traeger adds that there's much more here than a celebrity endorsement. EASN (Electronic Arts Sports Network) "uses celebrities as designers. We use the knowledge of the athlete to actually build his skills and strategies into the game."

TAKE YOUR PICK

So Jordan runs around with five other guys while your viewpoint shifts to follow the action. Sounds great, looks great, but how is it as a game? It's too early in development for critical analysis, but *Jordan in Flight* appears to have a surprisingly substantial amount of play strength — it's not just a video showcase, which it could have become. *Jordan in Flight* has a full



variety of play features and game options.

For starters, you can play in either of two modes. Jordan mode, in which you control Michael, demands a good deal of strategy because you not only control dribbling, shooting, and rebounding, but also deal with the more subtle aspects of basketball, such as setting picks and double-teaming. Ball-tracking mode caters more to the action-oriented player. Here, you control the player that has possession of the ball. The camera switches automatically to the player with the ball (the view is from behind his back), so you concentrate on more ball-handling and shooting and much less on strategy. Traeger says that, "originally we had only Jordan mode...but we started experimenting with the camera pan, and it's such a neat feature of the technology that we created the ball-tracking mode."

Other play options include Fouls, Goal Tending, and Music and Sound (all of which can be toggled) and Difficulty level (Street Ball, College, or Pro). You can also set the length of the game by number of minutes, number of points or buckets, or by quarters (five minutes each).

It's best to learn the game in Practice mode after experimenting with a number of the variables described above. When you think you're competitive enough, it's time for Tournament mode. This is for the big boys. You control Jordan's team in a double-elimination three-on-three



THE GAME: The camera moves constantly around the court for optimal viewing angles. The table of variables for tournament players (top right) is, according to Don Traeger, the largest in any sports sim to date.

tournament that's played according to pro rules — fouls and goal-tending count, and the computer defense is at its toughest.

When you select to play a tournament, the computer constructs the competing teams from a 30-player list. Each player has a unique combination of skills. In fact, says Traeger, the table of player variables is huge. "I think there are more variables than have ever been done for players in a sports sim," he notes. Factors such as vertical leap, fatigue, ball-handling, speed, shooting percentage, endurance, and emotional stability (which determines a player getting hot or cold) are just a few variables in the table. Each team has a fourth man that can be substituted during play — on Jordan's team, you call when and for whom he comes in. Smart substitutions, Traeger notes, can mean the difference between success and failure.

If you have trouble in Tournament mode, you can go back to Practice mode and compose the teams you want using the 30-player table.

Another game feature is the Video Edit Lab, where you can create an instant replay, watch it from any camera angle, select the view you want, run it any speed for desired effect, and record it as part of a sequenced highlight reel.

Jordan will require a 386 with VGA graphics. If your video card supports hi-res VGA, you can run the entire game in 640 X 400 resolution. You can also play from keyboard, joystick, or mouse (Traeger prefers a mouse).

When we see the finished Jordan in Flight in a few months, there's a strong chance that it will mark a generational leap forward in simulation technology. Electronic Arts is clearly trying to cross a new threshold with Jordan in Flight, and judging from our first look they're very, very close.

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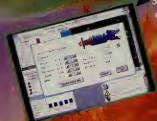
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The next generation of computer games will be on CD. Whether the format is MPC, Tandy's VIS, plain-Jane CD-ROM running under DOS, or whatever, it's clear that CD technology is the next wave. The big question for today's PC game players, though, is what do CD-ROM games offer right now?

CD-ROM drive owners already know the answer: enhanced versions of disk-based games released in the past year or two. And chances are you've already played some, if not many, of these titles. If you've added a CD-ROM drive to your PC, or you're about to, there are a number of questions you need to ask. Should I buy a CD-ROM version of a game I've already played? Should I buy the CD or disk version of a game I've never played before? Are the CD-version enhancements worth the extra cost? Will I be able to play from the CD without annoying pauses? Which CD-ROM games provide the best value?

Dedicated players with CD-ROM drives are, presumably, properly equipped for all the extra goodies you get with CD-ROM games. But just to be sure, make certain that you have a sound board, enough RAM (a minimum of one megabyte), VGA display, and a fast-enough microprocessor (at least a 20-MHz 386 SX). (For MPC games, you'll also need Windows 3.1.)

There are three considerations when judging the value of the

current crop of CD-ROM games: the quality and degree of the enhancement (where applicable); direct playability from the CD; and value for the dollar. Disk-to-CD upgrades fall roughly into two categories: a bundling of earlier disk releases (a la *Wing Commander* with *The Secret Missions*) or enhanced versions of individual games. In some cases, CD-ROM games offer good value — in some cases, not. Let's get down to specifics and take a look at a dozen or so CD-ROM titles based on previously released disk games.

The quality and reputation of Origin's *Wing Commander* games are beyond reproach. A classic space-combat simulation within a narrative framework, the original *Wing Commander* spawned two mission disks and a sequel with two of its own mission disks as well as a speech accessory pack. The *Wing Commander* games,



Secret Operations 2 for Wing Commander II



Ultima VI

like many Origin products, are big and ambitious — and they're memory hogs, chewing up megabytes of valuable hard drivespace like they were candy.

Earlier this year, Origin — in conjunction with The Software Toolworks, their CD-ROM distributor — created a wonderful package. For the bargain price of \$79.95 (suggested retail), you can get the *Wing Commander Deluxe Edition*, a single CD package that includes the original *Wing Commander*, *The Secret Missions*, and *The Secret Missions 2*. Not only is it a great deal (purchased separately, these three disk-based products have a suggested retail price of \$129.95), but it also saves the nearly 20 megabytes of hard drive space required by the disk versions.

Deluxe Edition can be played straight from the CD with only a moderate slowdown in seek-time during scene changes. When played with a special boot disk, firing is clean and smooth, with no jerkiness. Unfortunately, Origin games can't yet accommodate the superior page-exchange time afforded with extended memory, so if you want to play with your regular system configuration, expect a herky-jerky response from your fighters that makes victory tougher than it should be.

Origin is releasing their own CD-ROM version of *Wing Commander II Deluxe Edition* to get their feet wet in preparation for the long-awaited *Strike Commander*. Bundled with *Special Operations 1* and *2* and the speech pack, this also lists for \$79.95 (sold separately at retail: \$159.80). Origin has made the leap to CD-ROM smoothly, though the usual CONFIG.SYS handstands required for the latest Origin games are also necessary in

Wing Commander II. Once over this hump, however, the game plays just as cleanly as the first, perhaps even a little faster. There were some minor pauses during the animated sequences between missions, but none during flight.

The Software Toolworks is also distributing *Wing Commander* (without the extras) and *Ultima VI* on one CD, and *Wing Commander II* (with the Speech accessory but without *Special Operations*) with *Ultima Underworld* on another CD. Each CD lists for \$79.95, a savings of \$60 and \$80 respectively over the cost of separate disk purchases. All in all, these are great deals, though Origin could easily have fit the extra

Wing Commander programs in the *Ultima* bundles. The first six installments in Origin's *Ultima* series is also available on a single CD from The Software Toolworks for \$99.95, though it's questionable how many gamers are interested in using their CD-ROM drive to play games with CGA and EGA graphics. It's nice to be able to free up a little room on the hard drive by deleting *Ultima Underworld*, and the game play is so smooth off the CD that you won't notice any difference except when loading.

LucasArts has quickly become one of the most respected adventure game publishers, with several consecutive hits featuring their SCUMM adventure gaming engine. Now LucasArts has incorporated that highly efficient and user-friendly interface into a



The Secret of Monkey Island

CD-ROM GAMING — NOW OR LATER?

T. LIAM MCDONALD

true classic, *The Secret of Monkey Island*, for CD-ROM. The 16-color graphics of the disk version have been replaced with 256-color VGA graphics, and the addition of an original, reggae-laced soundtrack brings this favorite up to a technical par with games currently being released. The majority of CD space, however, is dedicated to French, Spanish, German, and Italian language versions of the game text. No speech has been added. With the regular disk version listing for \$34.95 as opposed to the CD-ROM for \$79.95, the value of this one is a bit questionable, but the CD version is undeniably a much better looking and sounding game than the original.

Loom, another LucasArts classic, has had a more extensive overhaul. Like *Monkey Island*, the quality of the graphics has been upgraded from 16 to 256 colors. But extensive speech has been added, along with some new art and animation (mostly closeups during dialogue scenes). The quality of the voices is top-flight and highly professional: actors — not the development team, the receptionist, and someone's Uncle Moe — perform the parts, and the amusing banter adds greatly to the game. The combination



Loom

of speech and movement is fairly smooth when played straight from the CD using a standard configuration (no boot disks needed here). This revamped version is a fairly pricey \$99.95 for two CDs (the second disc contains the 30-minute audio drama), while

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the disk version of *Loom* goes for \$29.95.

Another LucasArts hit, the World War II flight-sim *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*, is now on CD-ROM with all four *Tour of Duty* add-on packages. This much high-flying carnage would normally set you back \$189.75, but on CD-ROM it's a bargain at \$99.95. Four installation options allow you to choose how much of the game to put on your hard drive, from half a megabyte to the whole thing. Of course, the game runs fastest when coming straight from the hard drive, but there was only a negligible slowdown in the setup screens when played directly from the CD. Flight control was unaffected.

All LucasArts titles are published on CD-ROM by The Software Toolworks. Look for



Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe

"talkie" versions of *Monkey Island II: LeChuck's Revenge* and *Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis* sometime in 1993.

Besides producing CDs for other game publishers, The Software Toolworks is also busy releasing their own products on CD, the best and most famous being *Chessmaster 3000 MPC*. When you're finished admiring the gorgeous graphics and animation of *Battle Chess*, *Chessmaster 3000* is, in my opinion, the chess game to play. It's one of the most powerful and versatile chess programs on the market, and the Windows/MPC version has enough configurations and options to make your head spin.

The most impressive enhancement in the CD version of *The Chessmaster* is the massive speech support. The spoken rules, analysis, and notation serve as superb learning tools, and you can watch a replay of

one of 150 classic games and learn from the masters. If you're playing a game against the computer and ask *The Chessmaster* to suggest a move, he'll tell it to you, and then tell you why he chose that move. The disk-based Windows version lists for \$59.95, while *Chessmaster 3000 MPC*, with the expanded sound, has a suggested retail price of \$99.95.

Software Toolworks recently released *Chessmaster 3000 MPC Pro*, a version which contains five hours of digitized speech from Grand Master Anatoly Karpov on his ten favorite games; 1,700 additional games in the Game Library; and new famous replays between longtime rivals Karpov and world champion Gary Kasparov. The announcement of the Pro version is somewhat puzzling, since it's listed at the same price as the standard version. *Chessmaster 3000 MPC* will likely be phased out shortly and replaced with the Pro version.

Roberta Williams' *King's Quest V* fantasy adventure from Sierra has been ported to CD-ROM, and its list price of \$69.95 matches the disk-based version. What you get is a combination DOS/MPC version (it installs either way) with spoken dialogue. No other enhancements have been made in graphics or game play, so the CD version can be judged solely on the quality of the added voices. While it's certainly more effective to hear characters speak rather than just read what they say, the quality of the speech in *KQV* is hit and miss. Unlike LucasArts, Sierra apparently uses staff members to narrate their games, and the result is a mixed bag, ranging from the capable voices for Graham and the wizard Crispin to the grating voice of Cedric the owl. Overall, the recording quality is rather hollow and lacking in resonance, making the CD version just good, when it could have been great.

Virgin's *Spirit of Excalibur* is on par with *King's Quest V* in audio quality, though *Spirit* hits more than it misses with decent

accents, a beefed-up musical score, and somewhat denser recording quality. Despite the window-dressing, *Spirit* isn't nearly the game that *King's Quest V* is, and there isn't all that much room for vocal support. You can pick up the disk version of *Spirit of Excalibur* for \$29.95 (we were unable to get a list price for the CD-ROM version).

The Carmen Sandiego series has been around long enough to have passed beyond the realm of classic and into its own little industry (there's even a TV show derived from the games). That makes it especially refreshing to see that rather than resting on its laurels, Broderbund is pushing the series even farther. The CD-ROM version of *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe Edition* is easily the most extensive upgrade game product for CD-ROM. Weighing in at a hefty 120 MB (114 MB more than the floppy-



Chessmaster 3000 (MPC)

sequences, and 150 musical selections taken straight from the Smithsonian Institute's Folkways collection. The graphics are crisp and the animation is smooth, but the digitized photos suffer from the 16-color format. With any luck, they'll move on to 256 colors and remedy the shortcoming.

A separate Discography program is also included. Using an on-screen map of the world, you can select any of the 30 countries featured to access credits, get more information about the music, or view the pictures. Click on an action button in the Discography to hear an entire musical clip (sometimes three per country) and get some background on the meaning of the music, its recording, and the culture it comes from. A sample order form for the Folkways collection is also included on the disk. In short, *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego? Deluxe Edition* is the best CD upgrade yet produced. Broderbund sets no suggested retail price for its CD-ROM titles, preferring to let the market do it, but *Carmen* can be found in the \$60-\$80 range.

There are lots of available CD-ROM titles worth a look, with more right around the corner. If the sound isn't top-notch, or the upgrades not quite as enhanced as we might have liked, remember that CD-ROM is a medium in its infancy. Sierra, Dynamix, LucasArts, Origin, Software Toolworks, and Virgin all have big plans for CD-ROM, so in the months ahead expect games loaded with all the extras you could want.



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ALTERNATE LIVES

THE TWO TOWERS: A MASTERPIECE FOR TOLKIEN FANS

NEIL RANDALL



like *The Lord of the Rings*, Vol. 1 you probably won't enjoy this one either, but Tolkien devotees have every reason to like both.

Because this series was produced to appeal expressly to Tolkien fans, many of whom have read *The Lord of the Rings* a dozen times or more, the design challenges were many. First, fans know the ending. In fact, many of them know every step of the journey undertaken by Frodo, Sam, Gandalf, and the rest. They know all the characters in the novel, both major and minor, and they know that the entire plot hinges on the near-certainty of final failure. And they know Tolkien's mastery at shifting focus from one group of characters to another, leaving first one then the next in a desperate situation.

Interplay clearly understood this, for *The Two Towers* takes Tolkien squarely to heart even more than did *The Lord of the Rings*, Vol. 1. Like the novel, the game begins with three groups of characters, then shifts focus among these groups. In a certain sense, the game improves on the novel's chronology, because the quests of all three groups are intertwined even more closely than they are in the book.

The novel, for example, begins by tracing the journey

of Aragorn (the future king), Legolas (the elf), and Gimli (the dwarf). At an appropriate nail-biting moment, the action shifts to the two young hobbits, Merry and Pippin, as they escape from a band of orcs and find their way into the mysterious forest called Fangorn. Then it's back to the Aragorn group, then the Pippin duo, and so on until the end of the book's first half. After that, we learn the story of the other hobbits, Frodo and Sam, as they make their treacherous way to the land of Mordor. This half of the book merely refers to the other groups; it does not take us back to them.

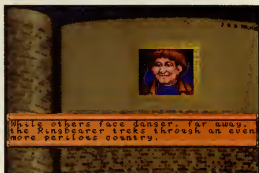
The game begins with the Aragorn group, then, at a cliffhanging moment, switches to the Pippin plot. At another cliffhanger, we get Frodo and

Sam trying to pick their way through the Dead Marshes. Then it's back to Aragorn, then Pippin, then to Frodo, and so on. If anything, this technique improves on the novel's creation of suspense because we know what each group is doing at each point in the story, and we keep returning to them just when we might have forgotten them. It's an effective method, and shows the effort that went into meeting the challenge of adhering to the novel.

A greater challenge, though, was giving the player something interesting to do without changing a plot that, for many readers, simply *mustn't* be changed. In the novel, Frodo tries to find his way into the land of Mordor to destroy the evil, controlling

J R. R. Tolkien hated and feared technology, so it's likely that if he were alive he'd be aghast at the thought of turning *The Lord of the Rings* into a computer game. Adapting the trilogy for television and movies has, in fact, turned out to be disastrous enough, and the more recent stage version, a form Tolkien would have at least partially approved of, was good but flawed in several respects. If Tolkien's work loses its power on the stage, and movies and TV make it an even bigger mess, what can a computer game accomplish beyond denigrating it entirely?

Quite a bit, as it turns out. Interplay Productions, which licensed *The Lord of the Rings* from the Tolkien estate, has followed *The Lord of the Rings*, Vol. 1, their 1990 release based on Tolkien's works, with *The Two Towers*. The game system hasn't changed very much from the first installment to the second, nor has Interplay's commitment to making this series the best Tolkien adaptation of any kind. If you didn't



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Ring, while the other members of the fellowship try to find a way to help him from afar. Frodo meets up with the pitiful creature Gollum, while two other hobbits encounter the ancient and unforgettable Ents. Gandalf the Wizard tries to rouse a once-great king into action, while Aragorn the Ranger begins to fulfill his lifelong destiny. These things happen in the novel, and it would be unspeakable to leave them out of the game — and they're not. These events happen in the game almost exactly as they happen in the novel.

Almost exactly, that is, but not quite. And it's the "not quite" that makes this product

a game, rather than just a slavish re-enactment of the novel. The major events of the book are completely in place, but the designers of *The Two Towers* have introduced a series of minor events. In doing

so they have taken a risk, of course, because to a Tolkien purist any addition is suspect. But these new occurrences are completely Tolkienesque in nature, and practically all them are either hinted at in the trilogy itself or in another of Tolkien's works.

In the book, for instance, Frodo crosses the Dead Marshes. But since it's pretty well impossible to re-create the horror that we feel with Frodo in the book, the game moves from the Marshes to other events or "sub-quests." Frodo must lift the curse from a trapped group of spirits, then free the spirits from torture at the hands of a necromancer. He can even come away from the Marshes with an elven warrior who's joined him for part of the remaining journey.

The plots surrounding the

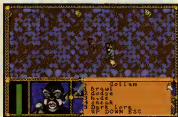
other characters are similarly enhanced. Aragorn and his companions meet up with the Riders of Rohan on the plain, as in the book, but from here they must help a recently devastated village, at one point even participating in a very Anglo-Saxonian were-gild (Rohan is based on Anglo-Saxon England). Merry and Pippin meet up with Treebeard the Ent, but rather than just rouse him to action then look on as Treebeard does the same to the rest of the Ents, they must wander through Fangorn Forest to find a couple other Ents and bring word back to the Ent council. Again, none of these events take place in the novel, but some are hinted at, and all of them are valid.

These sub-quests accomplish three things. First, they make *The Two Towers* an engrossing game without altering the extremely familiar plot. Because they maintain the feel and the content of Tolkien's works, they demonstrate the designers' respect for the original. Finally, they keep the game from becoming a parody of the novel. There's no way for a computer game to portray the personalities of the novel's characters, nor can a game capture the power of those characters interacting with the myth in which they find themselves moving. If the game tried to do either, it would quickly have become embarrassing.

The game system is largely unchanged from *The Lord of the Rings, Vol. 1*. Both graphics and sound have been improved over the first install-

ment, and an auto-mapping feature has been added, but other than that it's very similar. You're presented with an overhead view as you move the characters across the landscape via keyboard or mouse. Using skills remains a little clumsier than it should be, but casting spells is easier than in most fantasy RPGs (magic is far less powerful, though). Combat offers few options and little variety, but unlike many FRPs combat is *not* the focus of this game. In fact, you can work your way through much of the game without fighting at all, a very welcome change from the standard hack 'n' slash fare.

So if you don't fight much, and you don't cast many spells, what exactly do you do in this game? Exploration is the byword here, especially when you enter Middle Earth. Players who have never read Tolkien probably won't enjoy *The Two Towers*; the whole point of this series is to demonstrate that *The Lord of the Rings* can be translated faithfully to a computer game. But I'd like to go on record as stating that *The Two Towers* is the finest achievement to date in PC fantasy role-playing. I'm a huge Tolkien fan, and *The Two Towers* does about all I could ask for in a fantasy RPG. It steers clear of the "kill a monster, take the gold" clichés so common in computer FRPs, and that alone is worthy of considerable note.



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WILLIAM R. TROTTER



One of the abiding fascinations (and beguiling contradictions) of military history is that so many of the devices and artifacts that men have designed over the centuries in the grisly business of killing other men are, in an oddly compelling way, rather magnificent to look at. Suits of armor, castles, certain marks of firearms, certain types of combat aircraft...even the monstrous concrete fortresses of the Maginot Line possessed a cubistic beauty all their own.

But for me, nothing embodies the essence of sheer power, combined with majesty of line and form, like the World

War II-era battleships. Even in grainy old newsreels, their size, the elegance of their design, the massiveness of their presence as they seem to push the sea out of their way, still comes across thrillingly.

Millions of people responded to the capital ships of that era with similar feelings of awe—which is exactly why

governments used them as the spear-tip of any high-profile projection of power. If you listen to the awed comments of the thousands of visitors who tour the *USS North Carolina* or any of the other handful of battleships preserved as museums, you'll realize that people still react to these great ships with strong emotion.

And yet, when you stop to think about it, no one has ever made a truly convincing commercial film about battleships. Even 30 years ago, when a lot of them were still in commission, no film company could afford to do more than hitch a ride during fleet maneuvers; for combat footage, it was back to the newsreels or off to the big model tanks in the studio.

It would seem, then, that fleet engagements on the scale of Tsushima, Jutland, the *Bismarck* saga, or the epic slugfests that occurred in the Solomons would be ideally suited for computer simulation. And yet, until now, the only really classic PC game devoted to big-gun ships was Commander Alan Zimm's *Action Stations*! It featured a mind-boggling data base in-

corporating every major warship built between 1922 and 1945, and allowed the player to set up some fabulous might-have-been engagements (such as an all-out clash between the full might of the Italian Navy and the British Mediterranean



Fleet), but the graphics were too spartan (symbols on a radar screen) for the game to have mass appeal.

While naval warfare buffs have been gnashing their teeth in frustration, the major game companies have made colossal strides in the realism and you-are-there verisimilitude of aerial simulations. Only with the release of MicroProse's *Silent Service II* a few years back did the technology come of age that would allow naval simulations to have both the authenticity of Commander Zimm's home-workshop masterpiece along with the sort of war-movie graphic blandishments that



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could be savored in *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* or *Aces of the Pacific*.

As a naval-history buff and long-time battleship nut, I've been buttonholing game designers for years at CES and boring them with diatribes about the potential visual magnificence of naval battles on the PC. Imagine all those massive waterspouts! Searchlight beams! Star shells! Explosions on the scale of the one that happened when the *Bismarck* dropped a thousand-ton shot down the smokestack of the *HMS Hood*!

I don't flatter myself that my raving had anything to do with it, but it looks like 1992 is, at long last, going to be the Year of the Battleship. After all, just about every aircraft that ever flew in combat is now represented by a simulation, so the turn to naval subjects is only natural.

MicroProse is in the final stages of its recreation of the epic surface battles around Guadalcanal (*Task Force: 1942*), and RAW Entertainment is promising *Fleet Commander*, clothing all of Alan Zimm's magnificent data in state-of-the-art VGA graphics. *Control of the Seas*, a WW II South Pacific naval simulation from

Interstel, is also expected to ship soon. But SSI has beaten everyone to the punch by sending me a beta copy of *Great Naval Battles: North Atlantic*.

A full-fledged review will have to wait until later, for this preview version landed on my hard drive only two days before the absolute last-ditch deadline for this column, and many of the final touches are not yet in place. Nor have I had the time to do more than get my toes wet in the more advanced levels of play.

But I can report this much at least: graphically, this is the most beautiful war game SSI has ever produced — a major breakthrough that has been accomplished without the slightest compromise in the

passing overhead, and hear the thunder of the main battery.

Strategically, SSI has gotten it right: air power is in the game, of course, but the first three years of the North Atlantic struggle were dominated by a large British surface fleet (stretched thin, and with most of its few carriers desperately needed in the Mediterranean) against the smaller but technically superior *Kriegsmarine*. The Germans keep trying to get their pocket battleships into the convoy lanes; the British must stop them before the havoc they can wreak, in conjunction with the growing U-boat menace, spells disaster.

Having tasted some of the splendors of this game — a duel to the death between the



historical accuracy which has long been a hallmark of SSI's war games.

The sweep and majesty of capital ship combat on the high seas has been captured. Whether you elect to view the action from the Captain's vantage point on the bridge or from the fire control officer's viewpoint at the range-finder for either the main battery or the secondary armament, all the visuellelements are terrific. You see the enemy ship rippling with flame as it fires, clusters of shells ranging on their target and throwing up mighty plumes of water, the sudden flare and spewing debris of a direct hit. You'll feel the shudder of a near-miss on your own ship, draw back at the freight-train roar of 15-inch shells

Bismarck and the mighty *Prince of Wales*, a power-versus-agility contest between the *Rodney* and the *Gneisenau*, and a splendid re-creation of the Battle of the River Platte between the *Graf Spee* and three gutsy British cruisers — I cannot wait to explore its deeper, larger aspects.

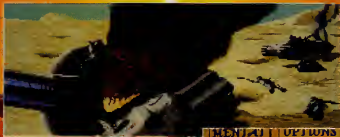
If the other, soon-to-arrive naval games equal this one, then fans of naval warfare have a veritable admiral's banquet in store for them.

The era of great warships has finally come to PC gaming, and it gives promise of being everything I had ever longed for.



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THE LEARNING GAME

TIME RIDERS AND ZOO KEEPER: AT THE HEAD OF THE CLASS

LESLIE EISER



Time Riders in American History

It's hard to resist super graphics, knockout sound, and dynamite game play, especially when they're topped with a giant helping of clear-cut educational content. And that's exactly what you'll find in two superlative new programs, *Time Riders in American History* and *Zoo Keeper*. Both games prove that education doesn't have to be boring, and that exciting games don't have to be mindless entertainment!

Time Riders in American History from The Learning Company is part movie script, part American History lesson, and all fun. It's a great way to brush up on the lives of some very important Americans, as well as discover what life was like between 1492 and 1905.

The Benefactor, mysterious head of the Time Riders, has gotten you, Josh, Amanda, and KAT (an automated pussycat that doubles as a Knowledge Access Terminal) together to help thwart the das-

tardly plans of the frightening Dr. Dread. Your team's goal is to unscramble historical headlines — to find out Who did What, and Where and When they did it. Unlike the classic Carmen Sandiego series, all the information needed is included in the program — there are over 2,300 clues about 145 historical events and 114 famous Americans, from General Custer to Sojourner Truth.

To access all this information, you use the hi-tech equipment furnished by the Benefactor: a hand-held Communicator, the TimeLine Machine in Amanda's room, the Geofax Machine, and the Biodata Machine, and the holographic Time Tube. You'll also get help from Josh and Amanda in the form of increasingly cryptic hints as you move up in expertise.

Each game starts with Dread's DNN broadcast of some ridiculous manipulation of history — he'd like the world better if "B.B. Dread Becomes First Woman to Practice on U.S. Supreme Basketball Court" or "Stormin' Norman Dread Leads Alamo Capture in Operation Alamo" were true. Your job is to correct his mistakes and perform a data uplink with his news satellite before time runs out.

Start off by working with the TimeLine Machine in

Amanda's room. Use her advice and the occasional hint to narrow down the possible date using a modified binary search — first pick the era, then the period, and finally the year. (You'll know you're right when Amanda offers her congratulations.) Next it's on to Josh's room and the Geofax machine. Josh's hints will direct you to the right location, provided you can find the source of the Missouri River when the map shows the west coast, or happen to know where the Great Lakes are in relation to the Appalachian Mountains.



Time Riders

Now that you know Where and When, it's time to figure out Who. Send KAT into the past using the Time Tube. The four hologram "interviews" she brings back contain information about the era, as well as hints to the identity of the person in the headline. Use these hints, along with the Biodata's short bios of important people living during the target period, to eliminate pos-



Time Riders

sibilities. Read up on the remaining people, select the best match, and perform the up-link with Dread's satellite. If all your work has been done properly, Dread will react to your invasion, first by getting mad and then by getting even. As you correct more and more headlines, you'll discover just how far Dread is willing to go to mangle history, but don't get scared off by Dweasel's rats and Dread's dirty tricks. The Benefactor is betting on you and the Time Riders to beat Dr. Dread in the end.

Zoo Keeper from Davidson is very different from *Time Riders*, but just as gorgeous. Like *Time Riders*, its sound effects and visual goodies make the game appealing, and the outstanding educational content makes it worth taking the time to play.

Zoo World needs your help to release a series of endangered creatures back into the wild. As a starting Whale Washer or Cage Cleaner, your job is to learn enough about each animal in the zoo to make its cage habitable. This in itself



Zoo Keeper

round, one of the troublemakers gives you a visual tip on which animal he last visited. Use the zoo map to pick out the area that animal lives in—desert, mountain, oceans and rivers, rainforest, grasslands, polar regions, or forest and woodlands.

Each area has its own zoo sounds, with tracks leading to the various cages labeled with animal names. Once there, you can admire the magnificent digitized backgrounds, and check out the damage.

If Greedy Gert and Brain Drain have visited, the food, plant, temperature, and humidity settings will have been affected; Stir Crazy and the Meaniac just like to leave gargelying around. Fortunately, Ronnie the Robot is always ready to offer advice. He's a veritable storehouse of information about the habitat of every animal in the zoo—what kind of temperature range each prefers, the level of humidity each usually likes, and what kind of food each enjoys the most. Use his information to check the settings and put the correct food and plants into the cages. Your reward will be an animated graphic of the animal against the digitized backdrop. Appropriate animal sounds and a closeup view through the binoculars (a marvelously detailed still image) are also available.

What makes *Zoo Keeper* educational is the absolutely incredible amount of information provided. There are 51 different animals (40 of which

are endangered) covered in astonishing detail for a program aimed at young players. To become Head Zoo Keeper, you have to learn all about each animal—not that hard to accomplish, but it's lots of fun and you get to see a healthy assortment of beautiful animals and scenery.

The amount of digitized art involved, the effective overlay of computer graphics on scenic backgrounds, and the extensive use of sound is extraordinary. Even the occasional memorials to extinct animals are tastefully done. Subtly included in the appropriate section of the zoo are signposts but empty cages for

animals like the Shamanu, the Atlas Bear, or the Syrian Onager. Youngsters who happen on these sections get a chance to read about these animals and to ponder, even if

only briefly, their passing.

Educational entertainment software has been improving at an amazing rate over the past several years, incorporating all the aural and visual enhancements that adult players expect in first-rate games, making it easier than ever for kids to become engrossed in the learning game. If your kids think education and fun are mutually exclusive, one look at *Timer Riders* and *Zoo Keeper* should change their minds.



Zoo Keeper

is tough enough, but troublemakers like Greedy Gert, Brain Drain, Stir Crazy, and the Meaniac make your job even more difficult. These pests constantly trash the cages of the animals, and in each new level it takes more and more experience to keep the zoo tidy. Succeed in locking up all the troublemakers on the loose in a single round, and an endangered creature will be released into the wild. Keep up the good work and you'll get a promotion, a plaque on the wall in Zoo Central, and the chance to do it again at a higher level.

Each time you start a new



Zoo Keeper



Zoo Keeper

GP

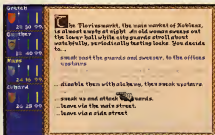
DARKLANDS

BERNARD YEE

Mention MicroProse, and the first things that come to mind are first-rate simulations and unique, innovative strategy games. *Civilization*, *F-19 Stealth Fighter*, *Railroad Tycoon*, *Silent Service II* — all evince a level of creativity and attention to detail that's helped make MicroProse one of the biggest names in PC entertainment software.

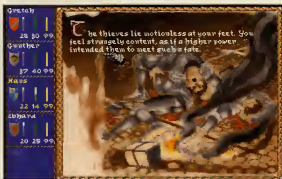
But one category MicroProse had never explored was fantasy role-playing — until now. With the release of *Darklands*, MicroProse has pulled off a surprising coup by introducing something new to a genre full of clichés. There are plenty of fantasy role-playing games (RPGs) on the market, but many of them are technical refinements of earlier game designs based primarily on *Dungeons & Dragons*; only a very few games have blazed new, substantially innovative trails.

Darklands is definitely a



You venture out on a variety of small quests in *Darklands*, including "espionage" missions to steal documents.

fresh approach to fantasy role-playing, and requires a little more patience than most of its peers. That's due in part to its complexity, along with the fact that you've never played anything like it. But *Darklands* is a captivating game, steeped in



One of the first ways to increase your fame and reputation is by dealing out street justice to thieves, rogues, and other miscreants.



Don't head out into the countryside until you've accumulated experience — you may not return.

history and atmosphere, and well worth the effort.

The game comes on eleven 5.25" disks and takes up a sizeable chunk — 17.5 megs — of your hard drive, with much of this space undoubtedly being used to store some of the rich graphic images which give *Darklands* the feel of a period piece. Medieval Germany was a vast and mysterious place, where life could be nasty, brutish, and short unless you were well-armed, and *Darklands* conveys this sense wonderfully.

While other companies try to inject bits and pieces of realism into their fantasy RPGs, MicroProse decided to go them

one better, placing *Darklands* in a historically "accurate" time. *Darklands* is based not so much on *Lord of the Rings* (the literary inspiration of almost all fantasy RPGs, whether on paper or PC) but on mythology and history textbooks. *Darklands* takes place in medieval Germany: not what it actually was, but what its citizens — with all their superstitions, religious beliefs, and folklore — perceived it to be.

Gone are the spell points, scrolls, and +5 pipe cleaners fantasy RPG fans are so accustomed to; get ready to become familiar with saints, alchemy, and yes, even Satan. Dragons and Satan's minions are in the nasties you'll encounter in

Pilot 42,000 tons of steel with big guns blazing!

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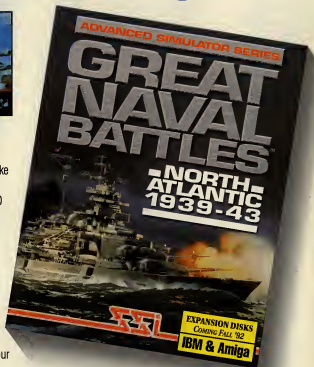


on the screen as 42,000 tons of steel respond to your command. Listen as dramatic sound effects re-create the roar of guns as you fire them. Watch the shells splash in the distance or explode on target. See the flash of enemy guns and feel your ship vibrate as she's hit. Take command even through the toughest North Atlantic storms!

You can also watch the action from

the **FLEET VIEW**, an eagle's-eye look of the individual ships of a task force, or the **GRAND ADMIRAL VIEW**, a strategic display of your entire navy and all visible enemy vessels on a map of the North Atlantic.

Fight the entire campaign, mini-campaigns or individual battles as the British navy seeks to protect her transport ships from German predators. All the action happens in real time or you can compress the scale. There's even an instant replay feature.



This advanced simulator also boasts the dedicated attention to historical accuracy and detail for which SSI is renowned: extensive online ship data and specifications; detailed damage report by

deck; even stunning cinematics to heighten the historical drama.

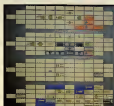
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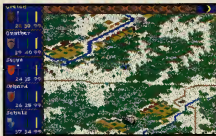
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Darklands, a world where pre-Reformation Catholicism manifests itself in hagiolatry—the veneration of saints.

Certain saints have mystical qualities ascribed to them, and your characters can try to invoke the saint for his or her special power. And resurrection exists only for believers come the judgment day—once dead, your characters stay dead. So don't develop a deep attachment to your characters, and always be prepared to toast a fallen comrade at the Inn before rolling up a new one.

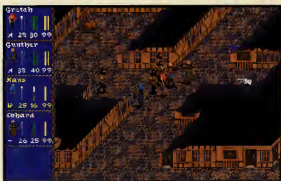
Character creation is a complex, detailed affair, reminiscent of the *MegaTraveller* system but not as ponderous. Not only can you choose nicknames and sex (*Darklands* is more egalitarian than medieval Germany), but also social caste and skills from a long list of possibilities. The usual traits



You have the opportunity to explore many towns as you journey throughout medieval Germany.

like intelligence and charisma are present, along with new attributes like divine favor. There's a default party that is fairly well-balanced for the impatient gamer, but a savvy *Darklands* player will take the time to read the educational and informative documentation and create a new party, concentrating on certain skills that will come in handy.

Unlike other fantasy RPGs, there are no levels, per se; your party won't include a 200-hit-point paladin by the end of the



Although the names may be different, the villages you enter in *Darklands* tend to look very similar.

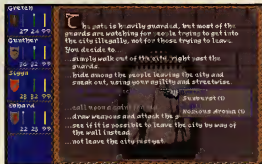
game. Your skills (including combat) will increase, and you will be a more formidable fighter; but as the manual aptly points out even a lowly thief might be able to strike a lucky, devastating blow against your hero. This unique feature means that in contrast to many games, you won't be slavishly protective of your 20th-level ranger. It also means you'll be less likely to return to a saved game just to recover a potent character; after all, you can just as easily save his or her equipment, return to an inn, and roll up a younger, effective character right away. More realism, less reliance on saved games—an example of excellent game design.

Your goals in *Darklands* are unclear, reflecting the nonlinear nature of the game. There is a super-evil being to defeat, but that isn't even hinted at in the beginning of the game. Your first steps are to roam the back alleyways of the city at night, hunting for thieves and bandits to improve your local reputation. As your fame increases,

you may be asked to embark on some quests for local figures—resist this temptation until you are strong, since the pay-offs are relatively low. Prowling the countryside is more likely to get some results, what with all the witches and Satanic cults out there.

There's some slow going at the beginning of *Darklands* because it can take some time for your characters to be assigned quests, some of the more lucrative involving overthrowing oppressive lords who have armed retainers. But you don't have to go anywhere first; wander where you feel strong enough to go. *Darklands* encourages exploration, but don't let the wonderment of your adventuring lure you into forgetting the passage of time: You will need to remember, for instance, the dates and places for witches' Sabbats so you can wreck the party (i.e., slaughter the evildoers).

Darkland's graphics, while not jaw-dropping, do a nice job of setting the appropriate mood. There are some stun-



Use alchemical potions to distract guards and make your escape.

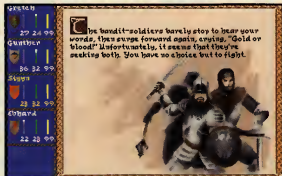
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A white handheld electronic device, possibly a calculator or a small computer, with a pen resting on its top left. The device has a circular display showing a target with a red bullseye. The brand name "CRAVE" is visible on the device.

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Bandits and robbers aren't found only in town — and the ones you meet in the wilderness are often much deadlier than their civilized counterparts.

ning still images of medieval cities, with spires and squares rendered in different palettes depending on the time of day. The isometric perspective only appears when your characters are in combat or exploring caverns or the like; the focus in *Darklands* is clearly not on spelunking. The sound effects are sparse but effective, and the

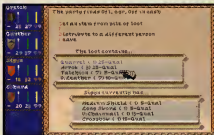
the main streets, skulk around in side alleys, or head toward the monastery, church, or other sections of town. This menu system also presents the various options unique to a particular situation, such as sneaking into locked offices or evading the town guard. The many context-sensitive options make this menu system surprisingly unconfining.

The magic system in *Darklands* is based on two elements: alchemy and religion. Using the catalytic Philosopher's Stone, alchemists are able to mix certain potions with magical effects. As in the *Ultima* series, alchemists must always be on the lookout for various reagents that are essential in preparing their wizardly concoctions. Though potions are necessary for survival, you

don't need to include a character in your party with alchemical skills; just make sure you can afford to buy these potions from the alchemists who sell their wares.

Alchemists, pharmacists, and physicians all sell the components to alchemical formulae, but no potion can be created without the mythical Philosopher's Stone. (For a hefty fee, you can upgrade the quality of your stone with a city alchemist.) Alchemists are a brooding, haughty lot, so be persistent—they may turn you away day after day before they are even willing to trade formulae, the cheapest and best way to increase your "spellbook." Once potions are made, they can be imbued or otherwise used for their salutary effects; thrown in combat to disorient, maim, and even kill foes; they can even distract bystanders so you can make your getaway.

Your other recourse to "magic" is to call upon saintly intervention. Your characters need to pay visits to the various monasteries to learn about saints, and it's not cheap. As you accumulate divine favor, you can try and invoke the saint's name in certain delicate situations. If you're lucky (and



One of the best ways to accumulate money is to sell the loot you take from vanquished enemies.

atmospheric music is noteworthy.

The exceptional combat system deserves special praise. Combat takes place in real time, but poses none of the usual hassles found in other real-time combat systems (such as the one used in *Eye of the Beholder*). You give orders to your party and watch them carry out your commands, and pause the combat with a click of the mouse to give new orders.

You use a series of menus to travel around the city where you begin your adventure. At any location, you can choose from options to travel down



Foes aren't limited to dastardly humans. This supernatural forest creature is difficult to defeat.

You stumbled back to your office after a long day of detective work. But before you can get cozy with a whiskey bottle, there's a message waiting on the phone machine.

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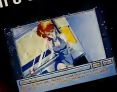
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NORTH ATLANTIC 1939-43

THE GREAT NAVAL BATTLES allow you to command the British or German navy in the North Atlantic during WWII. Captain's view puts you on the bridge with state of the art graphics. Fleet view gives you an aerial view perspective of a task force. Admiral view allows strategic play.

QUEST FOR GLORY

QUEST FOR GLORY is a fantasy adventure game. It features a rich, detailed world with a complex storyline. The game is designed for players who enjoy a deep, immersive experience.

TASK FORCE

TASK FORCE is a naval strategy game. It allows you to command a fleet of ships and engage in tactical battles. The game features realistic graphics and a challenging gameplay experience.

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APSA Wizard	\$26	APSA Wizard	\$26	APSA Wizard	\$26
APSA Wizard	\$26	APSA Wizard	\$26	APSA Wizard	\$26

Tempress

Tempress is a science fiction adventure game. It features a complex storyline and a rich, detailed world. The game is designed for players who enjoy a deep, immersive experience.

Second Conflict

Second Conflict is a strategy game. It allows you to command a fleet of ships and engage in tactical battles. The game features realistic graphics and a challenging gameplay experience.

GAME MAKER

GAME MAKER is a game development software. It allows you to create your own games. The software features a user-friendly interface and a wide range of tools and resources.

Harpoon 2	\$26	UMS 2	\$19	Merchandise	\$36
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Harpoon 2	\$26	UMS 2	\$19	Merchandise	\$36
Harpoon 2	\$26	UMS 2	\$19	Merchandise	\$36

LEGIONS OF KRELLA

Legions of Krella is a strategy game. It allows you to command a fleet of ships and engage in tactical battles. The game features realistic graphics and a challenging gameplay experience.

Second Conflict

Second Conflict is a strategy game. It allows you to command a fleet of ships and engage in tactical battles. The game features realistic graphics and a challenging gameplay experience.

DREADNOUGHTS

Dreadnoughts is a strategy game. It allows you to command a fleet of ships and engage in tactical battles. The game features realistic graphics and a challenging gameplay experience.

Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
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Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32

Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32
Master's War	\$36	IBM STRATEGY	\$15	RobotShip WIN	\$32

pious), the saint will intervene on your behalf, perhaps saving your mortal butt or giving you insight as to whether you should graciously accept lodging from a lord or slit his evil throat.

The aid of some saints is necessary in completing and solving certain quests, while others will help in day-to-day encounters with the minions of evil. The documentation features a well-researched list of saintly personages, so you'll know what you're getting, for example, when you study about Saint Gerlac. *Darklands*'s approach to magic gives the arcane arts a Tolkienesque feel; magic is a subtle, quirky, and mysterious conduit for unseen forces, rather than a roll of the dice to see the damage effects of a fireball.

Despite its many daring



Combat takes place in real time, but you can pause the action to give orders to each member of the party.

design choices and innovative approaches to combat and magic, *Darklands* disappoints in some ways. There is a sense of vastness to the game, but sometimes there doesn't seem to be that much to do—quests which result in only a handful of florins take too long compared to scouring the countryside for bandits and robber-knights. More than that, though, all towns seem to be



The party camps in the wilderness after a day's travels.

the same—you receive the same messages, see very similar graphics, and visit the same kinds of spots. It seems as if *Darklands* feels like it was rushed to market a little too quickly; hopefully a sequel will add more diversity to the landscape.

A couple of technical notes

—remove as many TSRs as possible from your boot configuration, or else *Darklands* has an unwelcome tendency to lock up. The game froze even when I used a vanilla boot-disk because several data files were corrupted during installation (re-installing the game cleared up that problem).

In keeping with a growing trend, MicroProse has given *Darklands* a utility that creates a floppy boot disk which uses Microsoft's EMM386 and eliminates any disk cache. As of this writing, the most current version of *Darklands* is .06, and hopefully it will remedy the game crashes, lock-ups, and other sporadic bugs some

players have reported. To MicroProse's credit, they are supporting the product diligently; you can download the latest bug patch from several online services, as well as MicroProse's own BBS.

Much effort went into the creation of the *Darklands* game engine, and the potential for sequels is enticing: medieval France, England, and Spain can provide similarly rich backdrops for role-playing. *Darklands* is a rare commodity; it has the audacity to educate as it engrosses and entertains, but learning medieval history has never been so painless. MicroProse should be lauded for providing the most original and unique fantasy RPG system to be released in quite some time, and we can only pray to our favorite saint that the next installment will be just as mesmerizing.

GP

Hardware requirements: 2 Megs RAM; DOS 5.0; VGA graphics; hard disk; 386/20 or faster recommended; supports all major sound cards; supports mouse.

The image shows the front cover of the NFL Football 96 video game box. The cover features a collage of NFL game action. In the center is a large shield-shaped logo with a blue field of white stars, a white football in the middle, and the letters 'NFL' in large red font. The top of the box has the word 'NFL' in a large, stylized font. The bottom right corner features the 'KONAMI' logo. The box is shown at an angle, revealing its thickness.

- 

down to, all my
tackles and
audibles, to NFL
draft, trades,
and digitized
gridiron sounds.

STATS	Team	Opposition
Points	104.0	104.0
Field Goals	40.0	40.0
Free Throws	64.0	64.0
Rebounds	32.0	32.0
Assists	24.0	24.0
Steals	8.0	8.0
Blocks	4.0	4.0
Turnovers	16.0	16.0
Minutes	240.0	240.0
Points per Game	26.0	26.0
Field Goals per Game	10.0	10.0
Free Throws per Game	16.0	16.0
Rebounds per Game	8.0	8.0
Assists per Game	6.0	6.0
Steals per Game	2.0	2.0
Blocks per Game	1.0	1.0
Turnovers per Game	4.0	4.0
Minutes per Game	60.0	60.0

-

Available Spring 1992 for MS-DOS

< Extensive statistics including half-time and end-of-game scoring summaries, end-of-game team and player stats, plus season stats for each player.

SEAHAWKS	W	1
BEARS	7	1
BUFFALOES	0	2
GIANTS	0	1

SPORTS UPDATE

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KONAMI

CRUSADERS OF THE DARK SAVANT

NEIL RANDALL

The Wizardry series was the first king of the computer role-playing market—in fact, it was largely responsible for creating that market. I remember my friends with their old Apple II's, spending hour upon hour trying to solve yet another level in the first *Wizardry*, then the second, and well into the third. By the time *Wizardry IV* came along, *Ultima*, *Bard's Tale*, and others had captured these players' imaginations as well, and the *Wizardry* series lost a fair bit of its momentum. And *Wizardry's* popularity wasn't helped any by the fact that it

rolled a certain number of dice (each with up to twenty sides) to generate your character's statistics, and every time you attempted a significant action. The idea was that every action had a certain chance of success, and that chance was greater or less according to the level of skill the character possessed.

The outcome depended on more than just the roll of the dice, though; there were die-roll modifiers as well. Wearing a certain type of boot might modify your armor class for that part of your body by +3 or +5, which meant you added that to your dice roll to see you if an attacker managed to damage you there. Or, as you took hit after hit or got increasingly tired, your ability to strike, defend, or even search the area around you decreased by a certain modifier. As always, the idea was that each situation should be unique, just as in real life.

The important part about these dice-rolls, and all the modifiers, is that players knew exactly what they were. You had your numbers in front of you, and all you needed to know was the modifier—set by the game master—in order

to figure out what you had to roll. The problem with computer FRPs is that the computer handles all such things invisibly, with the result that you spend much less time planning and more time just blundering forward. The *Wizardry* games tried to keep the information front and center.

Wizardry kept three other aspects of early non-computer FRPs alive as well, the first two of which aren't necessarily good. First, these games were heavily oriented towards combat. Second, they practically always took place in dungeons. FRP sessions consisted primarily of working your way through level after level of the dungeon, doing battle with monsters that got stronger as the levels went deeper. Defeating a monster meant both experience and treasure, and that's how your character became stronger.

The third aspect, though, is very welcome, and especially evident in *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, the latest installment in the series: you can go pretty almost anywhere you want in this game, tackling one quest ahead of another, and you won't find yourself completely



Down this ladder awaits...something. Click on the ladder, get to the bottom, then carefully work your way from room to room.

took longer than its counterparts to utilize new graphics technology.

But through all these changes *Wizardry* retained one feature that the other FRPs seemed to turn away from: it kept the spirit of the original non-computer fantasy role-playing games. The original *Wizardry* was released, after all, during the heyday of *Dungeons and Dragons*, and it drew its initial fans either from role-playing fans who happened to have computers, or computer owners who couldn't (or didn't want to) get a role-playing group started. The *Wizardry* games appealed, in other words, to dice-rollers.

Dice-rollers? Yep, dice-rollers. The outcome of events in non-computer FRPs was based on rolls of the dice. You



Talwe the fighter prepares to do battle against some slimy, creepy blobs. He can strike at either the high-lighted group of four or the larger group of eight.

at loose ends wondering where you should be. Like the non-computer FRPs that it recalls, *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* operates very much on a free-form basis.

As an adjunct to this quality, the game apparently contains parties of non-player characters (NPCs) who are also making their rounds, collecting artifacts and treasures you might be too late to pick up yourself. (I say "apparently" because this kind of thing is nearly impossible to determine: All you have to go on is your own party's point of view, but the documentation claims these other folks are out there.)

The previous Wizardry installment, *Bane of the Cosmic Forge*, represented a complete overhaul of the look and feel of Wizardry, without sacrificing the series' adherence to the early FRP models. With *Dark Savant*, however, the designers have revamped once more. Apparently no longer satisfied with lagging behind on things like graphics and sound, the designers have created a truly state-of-the-art version, technically at least, of a once extremely popular system.

One trend *Dark Savant* hasn't incorporated, though, is massive hardware requirements. True, it takes over five megabytes of your hard disk, but with some games now clocking in at anywhere from 12 to 20 megabytes, five is barely noticeable. Nor does it ask for a fast 386 processor; your XT clone will do, although game play will be almost excruciatingly slow. The game obviously runs much more smoothly on a faster machine (especially if you have some expanded memory to spare), but it's nice to know that you don't have to run out and buy a new machine just to play it.

As for the game itself, *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* offers few real changes in the standard FRP fare. You begin by creating characters, then forming these characters into a party. All the characters begin the quest at level 1, and as they wander the countryside and encounter monsters they accumulate experience, gold, and important items. The screen offers a first-person viewpoint, considerably more detailed than earlier Wizardries but no more so than most FRPs on the market these days. Your characters can move, search, pick locks, disarm traps, cast spells, use items, and get some rest, with all these actions controlled from an attractive and concise display at the bottom center of the main screen.

The character creation screen doubles in the game as the character inventory screen. You begin the game on this screen, selecting a name and a face for each character, as well as a race and profession. *Crusaders* offers an unusual mix of races, ranging from the inevitable humans and elves through canine, feline, and super-lizards, and another resembling a wookiee out of *Star Wars*. Each race has its own peculiarities (dragons have a superb breath weapon, for instance), and there's no such thing as a perfect blend. The professions, or character classes, range from the standard fighter, thief, and mage to the less common alchemist, ninja, lord, psionic, and valkyrie. The possibilities

are highly varied.

Clicking on a character's portrait from the main screen brings this screen up, allowing you to check inventory, including what the character is carrying in the "swag bag." It's here that you'll come to cast spells, read parchments, or determine the function of newly acquired items, as well as to equip a character, which is a simple matter of dragging an item (weapon, shield, helm, etc.) from the inventory slot and dropping it onto the "suit of



After freeing an NPC from a prison in New City, the leader of the party is offered information for a vow of silence. Agree, and you'll receive some extremely valuable advice....



armor" that represents the character. As you add or remove items from the suit of armor, you see the die-roll modifiers change for that portion of the character's body.

Finally, this screen appears whenever a character reaches a new skill level. There's no need in this game, as in many FRPs, to go to a special training room or other contrivance to increase levels; it all happens automatically, and this saves considerable time and aggravation (it also seems more realistic, although I understand the argu-

And here's the advice the NPC gives — or should we say starts to give.

In the heat of battle against three Gorns, Iolano the priest prepares to cast a Make Wounds spell.



ments for and against it). The inventory screen appears, and you select which skills you want to increase. If the character is a spellcaster, you also select the new spells you want your improved character to learn.

Obviously, a sword-wielder should be given a strong sword skill, and a good shield skill as well, but less obvious are the physical and academic skills. Physical skills include swimming, climbing, and scouting, which aren't surprising, but they also include oratory (needed for spell-cast-

ing), legerdemain (for theft), skulduggery (for disarming traps and picking locks), and ninjutsu (important for hiding). Among the academic skills, mapping is crucial for at least one character (it allows auto-mapping), while clerics will need theology and ninjas will need kirijutsu (knowledge of precise areas of the body vulnerable to attack). Keeping a balance of skills is essential, but there are never enough skill points to go around.

Perhaps the single most important skill, however, is

diplomacy. At least one member of the party should concentrate almost exclusively on developing this ability, because interaction with non-player characters matters a great deal in this game. When you meet NPCs who don't attack immediately, you have a chance to talk, trade items with them, and so on. There are also several instances where you actually enter into negotiations. This is called the "truce" option, and it's both fun and important.

Send up your best diplomat. Offer a bribe, or give the NPCs some items. Then offer peace, and see what transpires. If you have a lousy diplomat, the NPC might get angry, call for reinforcements, and try to rid the planet of your existence. But if all goes well, you can reach stage 2, in which the NPC hedges, or stage 3, which means



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AMAZON is designed in the style of the serials of the 1940's and 50's such as Flash Gordon, The Lost City, and Rocketman.

These serials were made up of intriguing, fast paced episodes which placed the hero in unbelievable peril. AMAZON contains 14 exciting episodes filled with plot twists, mysterious characters and heart stopping cliff-hangers. You haven't had this much fun since the drive-in days!



Metal monsters seek your destruction!

you're making progress. A bit more of this (and it doesn't have to happen all at once), and you can get the NPC to like you enough to give you items and, more importantly, information. The designer's notes state that word about you passes among NPCs in this game, but again that's difficult to determine when you're actually playing — nonetheless, the feature is fascinating.

Hopefully, the Wizardry design team will develop the NPC system even further, to the point where negotiation and combat are reversed in frequency and importance. Combat in this game simply takes on too much importance, and like all Wizardries it becomes extremely tedious after a while, even though the combat system itself, streamlined from previous installments, remains

a good one. My ideal Wizardry game would balance exploration with negotiation, reserving combat for the odd skirmish and some large and crucial battles that made sense according to the plot. It would be nice, too, if the first-person perspective actually allowed you to see enemies in the distance and let you avoid them, instead of just subjecting you to ambush at every turn.

This wish-list aside, though, *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* represents the single strongest advance in the Wizardry series to date. There's much to like about this long, involved game, and if you're a dedicated combat-oriented FRP player, you have hours and hours of detailed action ahead of you. If you've never encountered Wizardry before, this is the place to start, but keep in



mind that despite its evolving system, this is not an easy game to play. Wizardry is the granddaddy of computer role-playing games, and it's nice to see its new emergence.

GP

The character screen shows the character's portrait and inventory. The suit of armor lists the combat die-roll modifiers. You can cast spells from this screen, read parchments, and use or determine the function of items.

Hardware Requirements:
640K minimum memory;
VGA/MCGA, EGA, and
Tandy graphics; Roland, Ad
Lib, Sound Blaster, and Tandy
sound cards supported;
mouse recommended.



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THE LEGEND OF KYRANDIA

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

The *Legend of Kyrandia* is the latest release from Westwood Studios, creators of the enormously popular *Eye of the Beholder I & II*. Distributed by Virgin Games, *Kyrandia* is subtitled "Book One"—and if you enjoy graphic adventures, this is good news indeed.

In the land of Kyrandia, the ancient King William the First made a covenant with the powers of the Natural World. As a symbol of this alliance, the land of Kyrandia was given the Kyragem, an enormous jewel which concentrated and focused the magical powers of nature. It fell to King William and his descendants to protect the Kyragem and ensure that it was used to help the land



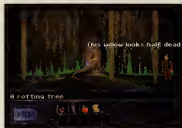
Realizing that Malcolm has escaped and will soon arrive, Brandon's grandfather Kallak writes a note to the other Mystics, asking that they aid Brandon.

and its people. So it was that Queen Thelia founded the disciplines of Alchemy, Spirituality, Scrolls, and Gem Lore. Each of the four schools was headed by a Royal Mystic, a powerful magician who would both develop new powers and see that old ones were not misused. For

hundreds of years, Kyrandia remained a land of peace and prosperity.

But things soon changed rather quickly. The recent reign of King William the Generous came to an abrupt end when the court jester, Malcolm, a powerful wizard in his own right, seized control of the Kyragem and killed the King and Queen. The Queen's father, Kallak, chief of the Royal Mystics and Master of Gem Lore, escaped with his infant grandson, Brandon. Kallak sealed the castle behind him, imprisoning Malcolm, but he also sealed in the Kyragem.

As Brandon grew into a young man, the Mystics became weaker and weaker. Cut off from the source of their powers, the day arrived when they could no longer hold Malcolm, and the jester broke free of his prison. Brandon, now grown, has lived all these years with his grandfather in the woods. Kallak has kept him ignorant of his royal heritage, but made arrangements with the other



Some areas of Kyrandia have been scarred by Malcolm's evil. Healing the land is part of Brandon's mission, and will often lead him to more important discoveries.

three Mystics to aid him when he needed it.

As you might imagine, *The Legend of Kyrandia* revolves around Brandon. Westwood Studios is obviously aiming *Kyrandia* at fans of Sierra's *King's Quest* series, and they've probably got a hit on their



In the deepest part of the Grotto is a wide river of molten lava. An important item lies just on the other side. Keep your cool, and you might make it across.



Brynn, Master of Spirituality, is the first Mystic that Brandon must see. She will guide him in his search for the magic amulet he needs to battle Malcolm.

hands. For starters, *Kyrandia* is a gorgeous game. It's clear that a lot of time has been spent polishing the 256-color VGA graphics, and even though they're in low resolution (320x200), so much care has been taken in color selection and shading that at first glance it looks as though the resolution is much higher. If your machine has a little horsepower (at least a 12 MHz 286 is suggested), you'll find everything smoothly animated as well.

Further, the game's designers created a villain you'll just love to hate. When we first see Malcolm, he's gleefully



The forest altar has lost all its power, but a child's toy holds the key to restoring the magic.

blowing up trees just to pass some time. He confronts Brandon's grandfather and turns him to stone, but leaves the old man's eyes unchanged so Kallak can still cry — this guy is *mean*!

For all its charm, however, this isn't a game filled with mind-boggling brain teasers. With a few notable exceptions, most of the puzzles aren't too tough to solve, and the overall level of challenge is only about average. The game is fairly large, but most locations have simple names like "Dark Forest" or "Southern Cliff," if you come across an area that has a more specific moniker ("Forest Altar," for example), you can be pretty sure it contains an object or information key to

your success. My major complaint about the game, in fact, is that all too often it's blatantly obvious which objects should be picked up or used. There's also a dearth of clues to solutions of problems, forcing you to depend on simple trial and error too often. On the plus side, however, bad decisions aren't always irreversible: if you lose an item because you used it incorrectly, it nearly always turns up again somewhere. You don't have to be fearful of experimenting, a welcome relief for most adventurers.

And because the point-and-click interface is extraordinarily simple, experimentation is easy as well as safe. If you click on an item which can be picked up, it sticks to the cursor so you can place it in Brandon's inventory. This is both a blessing and a curse. It does force you to think about what you should be doing instead of just mindlessly "trolling" around the screen with the mouse, but on the other hand you spend a lot of time

fruitlessly clicking on things that simply don't respond. Of course, this isn't a significant problem, since important items stick out like sore thumbs. Rather than make the items hard to find (although naturally a few are), the designers



Brandon journeys to the home of Darm, Master of Scrolls. Although old and deaf, Darm will give Brandon an item he'll use on more than one occasion.

have simply thrown in a few red herrings: some items have no use at all.



The fruit of the Fireberry bush offers the only source of light in the Serpent's Grotto. Save the game often as you make your way through the maze.

Brandon isn't entirely dependent on the items he finds. Thanks to a mystic amulet, he has a few powers of his own, and a large part of the game is devoted to finding the amulet and charging the jewels. That means enlisting the aid of the Royal Mystics, roughly dividing the game into four chapters.

You can easily move between these major areas once you discover the means to do so, and it's a feature you'll appreciate. If you get stumped,



At the gates of the Serpent's Grotto, Brandon meets Malcolm face to face for the first time. He can juggle three knives at once—fortunately, you only need to handle one.

it's often because you've overlooked something or (on rare occasions) an item appears where there seemingly was no item before. You may find yourself doing some occasional backtracking, but the process is about as painless as it can be. *The Legend of Kyrandia* is large, but it's structured so that if you do have to go back, you won't have to go far.

You can die in *Kyrandia*, but you can usually tell when you're about to do something fatal. Luckily, the game can be saved at any point, so save often and you can watch yourself die with impunity. In fact, the game's most challenging section practically requires you to save the game and die.

A good example of the practicality of the save-game function comes in the Serpent's Grotto, a huge maze (yes, you'll need to draw a map here!) filled with horrible monsters lurking in the shadows. The creatures are afraid of light, but scattered throughout the maze are Fireberry bushes, the fruit of which glows brilliantly. You can pick the fruit to use as a sort of organic lantern, but unfortunately the glow of the fruit fades quickly once it's been picked, and when darkness returns you'll be quickly surrounded and killed. So when you find a bush, save the game, walk until the Fireberry dies (which means



Zanthia, Master of Alchemy, disappears before she can help you, but her equipment is still intact. There are three potions possible — and each requires one plant and one gem to complete.

you will, too), and map out where you went. Then restore the game and try an alternate route — sooner or later, you'll find another bush.

Make sure your map is accurate though, since there are areas that are initially unreachable but which you'll need to revisit when you have a permanent source of illumination. If the rest of the game required this kind of meticulous attention, *Kyrandia* would earn two thumbs down, but the section doesn't last long, and adds just



With the proper potion, you can enter the tiny home of a troublesome pixie. He'll return the Royal Chalice, but he wants something in return.

the right dose of challenge.

Kyrandia isn't a perfect game, but the few problems it has are minor indeed compared to the fun to be had. Most of the time it crackles along, each graphic screen even prettier the last, and as an added bonus the game is genuinely funny. The light tone fits the difficulty level, and makes it a thoroughly entertaining, if not exactly brain-stretching, graphic adventure. Future installments hold even greater promise.



A potion also holds the key to reaching the castle. Transformed into a mystic Pegasus, Brandon can safely avoid the killer fish lurking in the bay.



Now all that's left is to get into the castle, defeat Malcolm, and free the Kyragem. Although Malcolm is a jester, he's no fool, and Brandon will need all his wits and powers to survive.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or MCGA graphics; hard drive; 286 or better recommended; supports all major sound cards; supports mouse (recommended).

GP

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IBM® PC and Compatibles: 5.25" (1.2 MB) and 3.5" (1.44 MB) disks enclosed. Requires: DOS 3.3 or higher, 286 or higher, 640K RAM, VGA Graphics, Hard Disk, and Mouse. Recommended: DOS 5.0 and 12 MB or faster. Sound Support: Ad Lib./Sound Blaster. PC speaker and more.

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL II

BRIAN CARROLL

The irrepressible John Madden, who charms millions of football fans each week on CBS telecasts, is known for his boundless energy and enthusiasm. Just ask the folks at Electronic Arts, who for the past five years have teamed with the colorful ex-coach of the Raiders to produce an impressive number of gridiron simulations for a variety of gaming systems.

The latest product of their fruitful collaboration is *John Madden Football II*, and this sequel is a welcome enhancement to its 1988 forebear. It delivers virtually everything the first one promised, with vastly improved visuals and a smoother interface that's easily mastered. And an interface which lets you navigate deftly and quickly is important here — with 81 plays on both offense and defense, you can use all the help you can get.

Like its predecessor, *Madden II* is a combination of arcade action and strategy. It's an attractive combination, one that many PC sports games strive for. It seems that all too many sports



Madden II helps you on pass plays by providing an aural warning when defensive pressure increases.

games can't decide whether they want to be statistics-heavy strategy affairs or arcade-style amusements, and only a small number have achieved a satisfying balance of both dimensions. Though *Madden II* lets you take charge of the on-field action, the joystick workout doesn't really add much to the experience.

But *Madden II*'s shortcomings in the arcade department are balanced by its excellent strategic elements. With its beefy playbooks, impressive editing capabilities, and mul-



Rushing is easy if you have a back that can hold onto the ball and blockers who can clear out some real estate. Player ratings can help you determine the quality of your ground attack.

tiplay design options, this new-and-improved edition packs quite a database. Almost every facet of *Madden II* is customizable, from individual plays and players to entire leagues.

It's a good thing you have so much leeway in modifying *Madden II*. Most PC gridiron veterans will want to customize the information here, at least to some degree: without an expensive NFL licensing agreement, *Madden II*'s designers were forced to disguise each team's players. And because there's no way to download team rosters or current stats, you're on your own if you want to model game play after the real thing.

Replicating your favorite pro team is made a bit easier, however, by the inclusion of a directory containing NFL rosters for teams from the 1990 season. The info is a bit old, but at least the players are rated accurately, giving you a head start toward inputting current data.

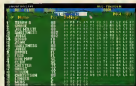
By enabling the editing of teams, leagues, players and playbooks, *Madden II* offers plenty of intriguing possibilities. The realism of *Madden II*'s playbooks rival those of MicroSport's *NFL Pro League*

Football, but each play is displayed graphically in *Madden II*, making play selection quicker and easier.

And if you like mapping out your own plays, the play-calling possibilities are enormous, thanks to *Madden II*'s fantastic "chalkboard" feature, greatly improved over the original *Madden*. Use it to draw up your own plays from scratch — you can choose a formation, make player assignments, map out routes, and tap the personnel best suited to make the play work. After diagramming it, you can run the play against the defense of your choice and see how it performs. The play during this "Fullpads" option is completely animated and looks just as it would during a game in progress.

You can further customize the game by using a rating system to determine each player's abilities. Every player is rated, both in general and position-specific categories. For example, an offensive tackle is rated for his blocking ability on passing and running plays, to name just two categories, in addition to the five ratings that apply to all players.

The ratings serve as an important scouting tool. By making intelligent starting as-



Each roster can be tailored to suit your needs. You're able to change names, positions, ratings, jersey numbers, and injury status.

signments, you can match your players against the opposition in such a way that you maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses. For example, if you're playing the National Football Conference's New York team (read: Giants), you'll want to find out where Lawrence Taylor's computer counterpart is positioned on the line. You might consider putting your best blocker on him to offset his play-breaking ability. The game's manual suggests looking for matchups where your player has a two-point or higher rating advantage over his opponent based on a nine-point scale, and that's sound (if fairly obvious) advice.

After you've created your Dream Team, complete with current stats and rosters, and have pieced together the perfect playbook, you're ready to hit the field. You've checked out your opponents and have made all the last-minute adjustments. It's at this point that *Madden II*, which until now has amazed and entertained, begins to disappoint—at least if you're



Try the Quick game option until you're comfortable with the playbook. It condenses your selection to nine plays.

looking for any enjoyment from arcade action.

The first thing you notice is the ridiculously large pigskin. Next you see that your team is dressed out in either red or blue, regardless of the NFL team they're supposed to represent. After the coin toss and kick, you see your players lurching to and fro like so many red and blue robots.

If your team kicked off, you'll be dismayed to find out that although your opponent can free-lance, your defense is locked into position once a set has been selected. You control no players on defense, which can be pretty frustrating; on offense, you control whoever is carrying the ball.

If you're planning on throwing the ball, you'd better know your receivers' routes by heart — you sure won't see many of them after they've left the line of scrimmage. (Interestingly, the designers acknowledge this: a note in the manual read, "Don't complain. As it is, you get to see a lot more than a real QB")

So it's not surprising that passing is one of the most difficult elements in *Madden II*. But it can also be the most rewarding, and represents the highlight of the game's arcade segments. Unlike most computer football games, which force you to scroll through your receivers one by one, *Madden II* gives you cross hairs to aim your passes. *Madden II*'s design team deserves credit for making this aspect of the game intuitive and enjoyable.

One other gripe: If you've



To see how your players stack up against the opposing team, scroll through several skill categories. If you have an advantage of two points or more in a category, try to exploit it with smart play selection.

watched football long enough, you know that an ill-executed handoff can decide a game. (A failed transfer between Giants' QB Joe Pisarcik and veteran running back Larry Csonka in the closing seconds of a game against the Philadelphia Eagles a few years back comes to mind.) Virtually all PC football

sims (which have arcade elements) include at least an option for manually controlling handoffs. But it's automated in *Madden II*, along with PATs and field goals. While some players won't miss the chore, it would be nice if you at least had the chance to give it a try.

Gamers craving high-flying action and realistic animation probably won't be too excited with *John Madden Football II*. But if you're looking for strategy, complexity, and the ability to control everything from player abilities and team rosters to playbooks and leagues, *Madden II* is a bonafide champ.

GP



Madden II's shining quality is its chalkboard for play-drawing. Here you can design all of your pre plays and then see how they stack up against some stiff competition.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; supports VGA, EGA, and Tandy graphics; 386 or faster recommended; supports all major sound cards; supports joystick and mouse (mouse recommended).

THE SUMMONING

NEIL RANDALL

About the time it was starting to look as though SSI was stuck in a rut, they've decided to depart from their tried-and-true Advanced Dungeons and Dragons formula. First came *Prophecy of the Shadow*, a simplified one-character FRP. Now they've released *The Summoning*, a richer, more varied one-character offering. Neither is related to the AD&D line, and in many ways this is a welcome change.

Not that there's anything wrong with AD&D. Fact is, it's the most popular role-playing game of all time, and SSI's computer adaptations are skillful and faithful. But the "party-beats-up-the-monsters" routine gets stale after a while, even for the most devoted players, and a change of pace often helps rekindle enthusiasm. And while it's true that in the past SSI hasn't offered much for



The intro sequence consists of a series of animated graphic screens relating the story leading up to your quest.

FRP fans who weren't interested in the AD&D line, these two newest titles serve to expand the following.

The good news is that *The Summoning*, designed by Event Horizon Software, is different enough to ensure that SSI's following really is expanded. It boasts fine graphics, an innovative magic system, and a very sound structure for interacting with non-player characters (NPCs). Add these features to a plot that appears to make more sense than those found in many FRPs, and you have the potential for a first-rate role-playing experience.

Does *The Summoning* fulfill that potential? The answer is yes and no, with the edge to the former. There's lots to do in



Choose the appropriate hand motions to cast spells.

this game, with many areas to explore, people to meet, and creatures to battle. More importantly, the people you meet aren't all set on killing you (as is the case in many FRPs), and many of them are worth stopping to talk to.

But after several hours of play, *The Summoning* begins to lose some of its appeal. It's difficult to pinpoint the exact reason; it might be a case of repeatedly doing the same thing, or it could be that the interface seems a bit clumsy after all is said and done. Whatever the cause, *The Summoning* becomes less engrossing the further you get into it—but not so much as to deny it its share of recommendations.

The Summoning is a one-character indoors FRP — i.e., you control one character only, encountering, avoiding, and battling creatures as you walk from room to room. The "avoiding" part, in fact, needs to be stressed, because unlike many FRPs you actually can avoid things. Just leave the room, or maneuver your way around the creatures, and in many cases you won't have to fight them at all. Of course, you won't gain any experience from evasion (a point I've never been able to understand), but if your character is weak and injured you at least have the option to flee.

To be fair, though, *The Summoning* assigns experience points in a much more reasonable fashion than other FRPs. Wiping out nasties gets you points, but so does solving some of the game's several puzzles (quite challenging for the most part) and doing good deeds for NPCs who are alive and living in this evil-wracked labyrinth. Your goal is to reach level 12 and earn the title Vanquisher, but that comes only after a long, long time. In the meantime, you must work your way through the ranks of Campaigner, Sentinel, Cavalier, Hero, and Champion, and the points needed to advance increases with each level.

The Summoning has several unusual and interesting features. For one thing, you can print maps of the areas you've visited, an extremely nice option when you tire of staring at the screen yet want to continue plotting your way through the game. Also available are printouts of conversations you have with NPCs. Anyone who's played a long, complex FRP knows that remembering what various NPCs have told you is next to impossible — either you forget to write everything down or you lose (or throw out) the reams of paper that contain this crucial information. Just keep your printer on as you play, and you're ensured that all your

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A gate bars the way, but stepping on the pressure plate in front of it might cause something to happen. If it doesn't open, try pushing a slain foe onto the plate before stepping on it.



conversations are recorded. (It will use quite a bit of paper, though.)

Dealing with the NPCs themselves is also fascinating. As long as someone doesn't actively attack you, you can approach and click on the NPC to start a conversation. As the NPC talks, certain words are highlighted; click on these to move to those topics of conversation, or just wait until the character finishes talking and choose another subject. To make things even more interesting, you can type in "keywords" that you've picked up from other NPCs to start a new branch of conversation. Some of these people have lengthy stories to recount, and all of them add to the game's strong sense of background.

The spellcasting system is original and efficient. At any point in the game, even in the



Accessing your inventory is simple, but grows tiresome after constant repetition.

midst of combat, you can click on your character's portrait and bring up the spell-memorization screen. Here you see several hands, each representing a different movement. Every spell requires a specific combination of hand movements, and clicking on the hand icons in the correct order memorizes a spell which you can then use when you return to the game screen. As you discover scrolls and talk with NPCs, you learn new hand combinations for creating new, more potent spells. It's very slick, and could serve as a strong basis for future spellcasting systems.

Other parts of the interface, however, are nowhere near as impressive. To attack, for instance, you maneuver your character into place near the enemy; often it seems you're in the right spot, when in fact you're facing slightly the wrong way.

Equally clumsy is the inventory screen, or, more particularly, getting to it. The main game screen shows a graphic of the adventure area on top and part of the inventory screen on the bottom. To access your inventory, you click and drag the bottom section upward. There's nothing wrong with this, except you do it so often that you'll wish for an icon that would bring it up automatically. (You can use the "+" and "-" keys, but that means taking your hand from the mouse and fumbling around the keyboard.) Furthermore, the icon for saving games is at the bottom of this screen, and if you hope to get very far you must save frequently.

The game has another curious detail, one that will fascinate some and infuriate others. To open some of the walls and doors, you step on pressure plates. But some of these plates require more weight than your character possesses, so you must literally push dead bodies around the corridors, trying to maneuver them on top of the plates to accumulate the needed weight. The fact that everything in this game actually *has* weight is a strong point in terms of

realism, but the dead body activity is both a little gruesome and a tad silly.

The plot is vast and very involved, and you can count on spending several hours just getting past the opening set of obstacles. Pay very close attention to the NPCs you meet early in the game, and don't bother with shortcuts. You need all the experience points and items you can possibly find early on, or you won't have a chance by



Returning to an NPC you encountered earlier, you find him more willing to make a bargain. Click on the highlighted word to start a conversation about that topic.

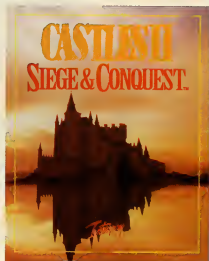
the time you reach the more dangerous areas.

All in all, *The Summoning* is a solid effort. If Event Horizon andSSI can combine its originality with more consistently gripping game play, the next installment should be top-drawer.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; 286 or faster; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, and compatible sound cards; supports mouse (recommended).

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MS-DOS Screens Pictured.

B-17 FLYING FORTRESS

LEE BUCHANAN

Fifteen miles from the target and under attack by a swarm of Me-109s, you hear the tail gunner in your B-17 cry out. He's been hit. But before you have time for that bad news to sink in, you discover that the No. 1 engine is on fire. After setting off the fire extinguisher on No. 1, you send the co-pilot to help the tail gunner slumped at his station. You're already taking a beating, and you haven't even reached the target yet. Thank-

fully, you're too busy trying to keep things under control to even think about what reception the Germans will have in store when your

Flying Fortress turns around and lumbers back to the base in England.

Sound a bit hairy? That's just a taste of the tense action in MicroProse's *B-17 Flying Fortress*, a new contender in the crowded arena of computer flight simulations. There are several great flight sims on the market, and *B-17* might not stack up against the best of them when measured strictly on their terms. There is no campaign to direct, no mission-builder, and only one plane to fly. But the heart of *Flying Fortress* isn't found in the plane itself, but rather in the men who serve in it.

As the manual says, "crew simulation" might be a more accurate description than "flight simulation" for *B-17 Flying Fortress*. Giving orders and manipulating a ten-man crew is at least as important as flying the plane and manning the guns. In *Flying Fortress*, you're a sort of director of the B-17. You have control over the crew, with responsibility for their careers, their skills — and



Here's an all too common sight — a *Flying Fortress* plunging from the sky, trailing a plume of black smoke.

their lives.

Sure, the standard action of air-combat sims is here: flying, bombing, and shooting down fighters. There's more to this simulation, however, than shoot-'em-up and head for home. The crew members get wounded with frightening frequency, and when they do you must order someone to tend to his fallen comrade. Crew members can also be dispatched to repair damaged guns and other equipment.

After the handsome opening screens, you're introduced to the crew and get to select your craft's name and nose art (the latter includes some scantily clad beauties, which is historically, if not now politically, correct). Crew members are each rated in the skills required to operate the B-17 — bombardier, gunner, navigator, radio operator, and pilot. Manually operate a position, and the crew member's skill rating for that position increases.

You and your crew operate from bases in England, flying missions against factories, bridges, docks, and railroad centers. The only way you'll make it back to the U.S. is to survive 25 missions — a feat as difficult here as it was in real life.

The mission briefing sequence is one of the best yet for a flight sim, with black-and-white "films" (made up of sharp polygon graphics) of primary and secondary targets. All flights start at the base, where you must taxi to the runway, take off, and join the formation. For those players who don't enjoy real-time flight, a time-skip function and autopilot helps get the mission underway.

The action heats up quickly when the formation comes under attack, and the polygon graphics are at their best when the player is fending off German fighters. Kills come in a wonderful variety: some planes spiral downward in a plume of smoke, while others are literally blown apart, losing wings and tail sections as they tumble end over end.

From the cockpit, the player can view a sharply detailed instrument panel that must be viewed in three banks. Options for external views are numerous, and include a good sight of bombs hitting their target.

You can switch to any of the positions on the aircraft, as long as there's a healthy crew member at that station. The computer takes over when the player jumps out of a position, but don't expect your computer



During the Mission Briefing you're shown "footage" of your targets.

SIEGE

The hordes approach! Are the archers on the battlements? Are there cauldrons full of boiling oil atop the towers? Are the castle gates fiercely guarded? Are your concealed wizards in place? Can your castle withstand the *Siege*??

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Fantastical elements challenge your leadership with a never-ending variety of contests and dilemmas. Should your knights sortie out against the attacking rabble? Is your wizard strong enough to throw another fireball into the enemy ranks?

Siege gives you four castles to defend and attack. You can't do it all yourself; you must depend on your vassals and their troops, each with their own abilities and skills.

Prove your mastery of the art of *Siege*! Test your mettle in the existing sieges, or design your own scenarios. What if Highrock Fortress were held by trolls, or Usk'hem Gart by elves?

 MINDCRAFT

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Actual screen photos from the IBM VGA version.



There's more to B-17 than flying the rugged craft. Gunners fall prey to flak and enemy fighters with alarming regularity, and it's up to you manage the situation.

pilot to manage the engines properly or your bombardier to hit the target. Until your crew gets better, in fact, you'll have to jump all over the place just to keep the big plane in the air and headed in the right direction.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of B-17 is its scope, which goes beyond the mission itself. If you're lucky enough to get home, you may find that one or two experienced crew members have to be hospitalized. (You get replacements, but of course they're going to be green.) If the crew's performance warrants recognition, it's up to you to recommend individuals for medals or promotions. Another nice touch is the addition of symbols to the nose of the plane to tally kills and successful missions.

In typical Microprose fashion, the manual is complete and meticulously documented. The graphics, on the other hand, are a mixed bag. The cutaway view of the plane and the interior screens are splendidly ren-

dered and detailed, but the graphics of other objects — ground, clouds, and aircraft — are good but unremarkable. The palette is somewhat drab, and other planes aren't distinguishable except at very close range.

Simulated landings should be demanding, but at least for this weekend pilot, landing the B-17 is an exercise in frustration. In the cockpit, you can look at the instrument panel or look through the windshield — but you can't do both at the same time. Trying to control throttle, pitch, and rate of descent while switching between the views makes landing an overly difficult challenge.

The tough landings are compounded by another frustrating oversight: the autopilot function doesn't work for landings. The computer pilot will dutifully take over at any other time — taking off, joining formation, and getting to and from the target. But contrary to the instructions in the Technical Supplement, the fellow refuses to help land the plane, and that's an especially maddening flaw given the views from the cockpit.

The sound effects in B-17 are another weak spot. Though B-17 supports the major sound boards, the sound effects aren't up to the standards most play-

ers expect in a flight simulation. With the exception of the thud from the bomber's guns, which is excellent, most sounds are uninspired. There is no whine of falling bombs, no "chirp" on landing and no clatter as enemy fire strikes the B-17. Worst of all is

the monotone engine noise, which doesn't alter pitch to reflect changes in throttle.

With the emphasis on crew interaction, B-17 just begs for digitized speech like that in *Falcon 3.0*. Hearing a gunner's cry when he's hit or the pilot's warning that the plane can't hold formation would be much more dramatic than just reading text messages.

I'd also like to see a crew editor included so the player could command a personalized crew; with so much emphasis on the various duties involved in manning a B-17, such a fea-



This is one of three banks of instrument panels you can access in the cockpit.

ture would enhance the game's ambience dramatically.

While there are flaws, none alone is fatal to this innovative approach to air combat. B-17 Flying Fortress is a solid game, one that only requires support from its designers to become a first-rate simulation. Fine-tune the sounds a bit, add some digitized voices, and toss in a few more pre- and in-flight options, and B-17 could enjoy a long career on the hard drives of many flight sim fanatics.

GP



The cutaway view lets you assess damage and casualties quickly.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; DOS 5.0, VGA or MCGA graphics; hard drive; 386/16 or faster recommended; supports Ad Lib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports joystick (recommended) and mouse.

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SIEGE

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

Siege warfare is one of the most complex and fascinating phenomena in the annals of military history. There is an enduring appeal to the art and science of fortifications, especially castles, and to the technology needed to overcome them. Historically speaking, great sieges are the stuff of heroic legend: Hector and Achilles at the walls of Troy, Massada holding out against the legions of Rome, the Templar knights defending Malta against the Ottoman Turks, Davy Crockett and Company fighting to the last man at the Alamo...stirring stuff, indeed.

But it's the sort of thing that's very difficult to reproduce on a computer screen. In order to yield a satisfying and exciting simulation, a siege program must give players the ability to zoom in very close to the action, and then zoom out for a look at the entire battle-

field. To succeed in either attack or defense, the game must provide a fine degree of control over not only the physical deployment of his various units,

but — perhaps most critical of all — a chance to coordinate the timing of various actions.

Until now, *Interplay's Castles* was literally the only game in town. While *Castles* earns high marks for its beauty and its highly original concept, it is mainly a design-and-build program. The sieges depicted were mostly set-piece attacks that all tended to look alike, and the defender had only a modicum of control over his troops. *Interplay* has promised that *Castles II* will feature a revamped and expanded system for siege combat, but as of this writing that title has yet to be released.

Be sure to relieve or replace units that are weary or suffering heavy losses.



Go to the Barracks to form and deploy new units.

work out in action.

Along comes *Siege* by Mindcraft, one of the scrappiest and most creative of the smaller game companies, and with its arrival the "envelope" for siege simulations isn't just pushed, it's torn to shreds.

Based loosely on events and incidents in Mindcraft's earlier *Magic Candle* games, *Siege* gives you the opportunity to attack or defend four extremely different castles. Each setting offers six scenarios with different mixes of troops, some favoring the defense, others pretty evenly balanced. Whichever scenario you choose, the difficulty level can be set before combat begins; an easier setting does not alter the fighting characteristics of any units, it simply lets you deploy a greater number of warriors.

All scenarios begin with the game paused, giving you a chance to look around and assess the overall situation. Once you're familiar with what's going on, call up the Barracks screen and deploy troops or heavy weapons. Active units are highlighted in yellow, meaning you can issue a multitude of orders, telling that unit where to go and what to do when it gets there. Since nobody moves until you release the game from its pause mode, you can coordinate the actions of several units before settling back to see how your plans

If you choose to play as the attacker, you'll have to construct bridges, scaling ladders, siege towers, and battering rams. Assign archers to give cover to assaulting units, or target your catapults to batter down a section of wall. The defender, of course, must try to sink those pontoon bridges, shatter those siege towers, and pour flaming oil down on the heads of anyone trying to climb those scaling ladders.

Engineers are the backbone of a siege army. Each engineer you deploy can carry one section of a bridge, a ladder, or a siege tower. The bigger the item, of course, the more engineers needed to carry all the parts. It's best to send extra engineers into combat to compensate for losses; otherwise your catapults may cease to fire and your towers remain unbuilt.

Press the H key and all combatants are superimposed with "histograms"—small bar graphs that depict the health and energy of troops on both sides. If your own men seem to be flagging, use the Replace or Reinforce commands to bring fresh troops from the barracks. If an enemy unit seems to be weary, you can redouble your efforts, perhaps using the Split command to flank or surround the enemy force.



Active units are highlighted in yellow.



This medium-close view is most useful for planning troop movements.

Given the complexity of siege battles, and the wide variety of commands that are necessary for either a successful defense or a successful conquest, a game like *Siege* stands or falls on its interface. Mindcraft has done a splendid job, creating an interface that is both sensible and efficient. This is not meant to deny the complexity of the program, for it is very likely that you'll feel overwhelmed during your first few scenarios. *Siege* is a real-time simulation—no "taking turns" here!—so the enemy is always as busy or busier than you are. Just remember to pause action until you regain composure. And never let yourself get so caught up in the epic battle for control of, say, the southeast tower, that you forget to zoom out and see what the enemy may be doing at the northern gate.

Siege gives you a remarkable degree of control over your troops. Command a unit to go to a certain spot and it will march there, waiting for further orders, yet prepared to defend itself if attacked. You can perform flanking attacks, mass archers for fire support, or conduct sorties from the castle out into the countryside. Once a unit is active, simply select the command you want and designate, with an easy mouse-drag, the area where that command is to be carried out.



Use the strategic view to keep up with the overall situation.



Launch flaming oil from your catapults to destroy enemy bridges and siege engines.

Ranged weapons—catapults and ballistas—can be targeted to bombard a selected portion of the battlefield, or they can be precisely targeted with cross hairs to concentrate on a bridge, a section of wall, or even an individual (a powerful hero or a magician, for example).

At the conclusion of each day's fighting, the computer summarizes losses for the day and tells you how many of your previously wounded soldiers have been released from the hospital and how many have deserted. (Desertions take place when the ratio of friendly-versus-enemy losses becomes dangerously one-sided.)

Graphically, *Siege* is one of the most exciting programs we've ever seen. There may be several hundred individual soldiers maneuvering and fighting on the screen at the same time. Clouds of arrows fly, engineers rush forward to build their bridges and battering rams, troops swarm up scaling ladders only to be greeted with jars of flaming oil dumped on their heads. Melee battles are intense, and when the outcome has been decided, the walls or the landscape around the moat are littered with twisted, bloody corpses.

The scenarios provided with the game are many and varied, but Mindcraft has also included a do-it-yourself option which allows you to modify existing scenarios, or take one of the programmed castles and devise a totally new scenario from the ground up.

Mindcraft has patterned the troops in *Siege* after the various races found in the *Magic Candle* games, which means armies

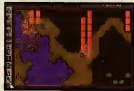
may be composed of orcs, dwarves, trolls, and goblins, as well as humans. In some ways that decision may work against Mindcraft's best interests, because many war-gamers won't touch a game that smacks of swords-and-sorcery. And that would be a pity in this case, because *Siege* is a terrific war game, goblins or no goblins. If the inclusion of fantasy characters bothers you, just pretend the armies are made up of Saracens and crusaders, or Romans and Carthaginians—whatever fires your imagination.

If that doesn't do the trick, go into the editing mode and generate armies composed of nothing but human warriors. If you do that, however, you miss

the fun of watching berserk axe-wielding dwarves chopping their way through the enemy, or Blue Wizards hurling fireballs, or the amazing giant spiders that have no need for ladders in order to scale a castle's walls!

Anyway you look at it, any way you choose to play it, *Siege* is a hugely ambitious and successful simulation, filled with powerful images and swift-moving action.

GP



The Histogram feature superimposes bar graphs indicating the health and energy level of enemy troops.

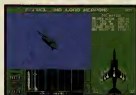
Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; hard drive; 12 Mhz 286 or better; supports all major sound boards; mouse required.

BIRDS OF PREY

LEE BUCHANAN

One of the most successful categories of PC gaming software is the air-combat simulation. And that popularity has undoubtedly helped spur the release of several crackerjack flight sims in the past couple of years, including *Aces of the Pacific*, *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe*, and *Falcon 3.0*, to name a few. Each has its own distinct strengths, but all of them set a high standard for the competition.

Into this tough market comes *Birds of Prey*, a flight sim created by Argonaut Software and distributed by Electronic Arts. *Birds of Prey* promises a lot, with over 40 modern aircraft to choose from as you take to the skies in a fictional East-West war. And the variety of mis-



Choose a weapons load from this pre-flight screen.

sions is also encouraging: tangling with elite fighters, flying in support of ground forces, escorting bombers, and conducting surgical strikes and airborne operations.

Birds of Prey aims high, but unfortunately it falls far short of its mark. The variety of aircraft—the game's strength—

is simultaneously its downfall. Those 40 planes are somehow packed into just over 400K on the hard drive, and once you hop into the cockpit of one it becomes apparent how the designers squeezed so much into such a small space—the cockpits of all 40 planes are identical.

After creating a pilot, you choose a mission type from an attractive menu consisting of various combat scenes. Next select which side you want to join (cleverly named "A" and "B") and your home base or carrier. Although you can fly any type of plane on any mission—even a 747 jumbo jet in the role of fighter-interceptor—the menu offers a selection of aircraft suitable for a particular mission. Choose a bombing mission for side A, for instance, and you can fly a B-52 or a B-1B.

After arming the plane with a generous selection of air-to-ground or air-to-air missiles and bombs, you're off to the hanger or the carrier deck. In one respect, it's not so annoying that all the cockpits are the same: The view is a lot better without the instrument panel. Toggle off the instruments and you get a panoramic view through the windshield



Switch to an external view as you send a missile speeding to its target.

with HUD displays tailored to the individual planes.

Another disappointment are the graphics, which would have been state of the art a few years ago but pale in comparison with the more recent flight sims. The landscape is flat, with an occasional snow-capped triangle to break the monotony. The sky, however, is much more satisfying, with a nice color gradient from the horizon upward. Exterior views of the player's aircraft and other planes, though numerous, are uninspired and difficult to manipulate. And if you're shot down, you'll merely see a mass of geometric shapes instead of a colorful bitmapped explosion.

You can fly with either a joystick or mouse, but both were rather jumpy on my 486, making accurate control difficult.

Despite its flaws, *Birds of Prey* has some merits that shouldn't be overlooked. For gamers who don't want to commit an acre or two of their hard drive for a flight sim, *Birds of Prey* offers a broad array of modern aircraft. The variety of missions and a strategic view of the conflict are also pluses. But with all the excellent flight sims on the market today, I can't recommend *Birds of Prey* to the serious aficionado.

GP



Birds of Prey sports an amazing variety of missions, but in this case there isn't strength in numbers.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or EGA graphics; hard drive; 386/16 or faster recommended; supports Ad Lib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse and joystick.

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HEAVEN & EARTH

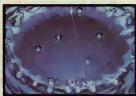
LESLIE MIZELL

Puzzle fans who complain that most games aren't challenging enough can whine no more. *Heaven & Earth*, a new game from Disney's adult-oriented software division, Buena Vista Software, requires the concentration and brain flexibility needed to pass a MENSA test.

Heaven & Earth may well be the first philosophical computer game. Based on the teachings of Shambhala, a follower of Buddha, it seems (according to the instruction manual) geared to helping an enlightened society transcend to a more celestial realm. Nice

work if you can get it.

In "The Pendulum," the first game, a giant pendulum swings above a shallow dish containing one or



In "The Pendulum," you must balance a swinging pointer in the heart of an orb.

more "positive vortices" or orbs. You look down at the dish from a 60-degree angle and control the arc of the pendulum by moving your mouse (or with the directional arrow keys). Slowly and painstakingly, you make an orb disappear by making the pendulum stop directly over it.

The second game, "The Card Game," is the easiest of the three, although you'll need the instruction manual as a reference long after you've learned the basic rules. The 48 cards are assigned a landscape, an element, and a season. About half also have a celestial or meteorological phenomena—an eclipse, tornado, rainbow, and so on. As the cards are dealt in four rounds, you must make the best possible hand, using as many cards as possible. You can collect tricks of like landscapes, opposite months, and collections of ele-

ments or seasons (or both). Special scores are possible using the phenomena cards, which appear randomly in each game.

"The Illusions" section is made up of a dozen mind-games and puzzles involving spatial relationships. In "Figure Ground," you rearrange squares on a grid to match a model. In "Anti-Maze," you move a single square through a maze in which you can pass through some solid walls and can't pass through some seemingly empty passageways. And in "Convex Concave," you construct optical illusions—many based on the works of M.C. Escher—from supplied blocks.



"The Illusions" is made up of a dozen spatial-relationship puzzles featuring matching, mazes, and maneuvers. In "Flip Turn," you must rotate the shapes in the four boxes until they form the composite model.

working room for many of the spatial-relationship puzzles. You're given a grid or area exactly the size of the finished model, and can't move pieces outside that area. And once you've placed two pieces together, they're locked and can't be moved except as a unit.

Heaven & Earth is also hindered by its irritatingly frequent copy protection in which you answer questions from

the game manual, without even a page number for guidance. You must answer a question when you load the game, before you play any of the three divisions, and often when you exit a division.

Demanding and occasionally trying, *Heaven and Earth* can some-

times be too much work to be fun in the usual sense. But it's certainly an impressive achievement, and if you've got the time, the IQ, and the coordination, *Heaven and Earth* offers a rewarding gaming experience.

GP



"The Card Game" is the easiest section, but it still takes time to master.

The graphic work in all three games is fantastic. The 256-color VGA graphics in "The Pendulum" are appropriately soothing, while the high-res 16-color graphics are perfect for the highly detailed animation of the card sets.

All the games are challenging, but there are a couple of annoyances in "The Illusions." Because you can advance at will, you can't get stuck in a section. But you can't save any of the sections in progress either, so you must finish in one sitting if you plan to check that section off the records table. And there's no

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA, MCGA, EGA, or Tandy 16-color graphics; 286 or faster; hard drive required; supports most sound cards and the Disney Sound Source; supports mouse (recommended).

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THE CARL LEWIS CHALLENGE

CHRIS SLATE

Psygnosis has a treat for all of you die-hard Olympic fans out there — you can now re-create some of your favorite moments of the 1992 Summer Olympics with *The Carl Lewis Challenge*. You control a team of the world's top track-and-field athletes in a race for the gold in five different events: the 100M Sprint, 110M Hurdles, the Javelin Throw, the High Jump, and the Long Jump.

The Carl Lewis Challenge offers several play options. You can concentrate solely on training your athletes and let the computer determine their performance, or you can drop all of the statistical stuff and jump right into the action with the arcade mode (in arcade mode, however,



The hurdles are easiest to jump when using the Gearing control method. Press the jump button as soon as the gear meter is only one or two clicks away from a hurdle.

your squad always has average performance characteristics). In the full simulation, you determine your team's training strategies and control the action to boot.

You and up to three other human players are given five weeks of game time to get each of your squads into competi-

tive shape. At the beginning of each week you'll plan a training schedule for every athlete. With ten different exercises at your disposal, it's up to you to decide how much time an athlete should spend on each one. If a member of your team has a low agility rating, for example, he should concentrate on Static and Ballistic Stretches. Looking for more power? Increase the amount of time spent on Isotonics and Isometrics.

With every exercise you decide how long each athlete's workout session will be, how frequent the sessions, and the level of intensity while performing an exercise. These different factors are difficult to balance at first, but with time you'll be cranking out world-class athletes. (A hint book is included to help you get started.)

Once you've come up with a well-balanced team, it's time to compete in international competition. This is where you finally get to see the fruits of your labor. If you trained your squad well, they should have an easy time against the competition. If you did your job poorly, it



Timing is everything in the javelin toss. Prepare your throw early in your approach to get it off before crossing the fault line.

won't take long to find out. Three methods of control — Speed, Rhythm, or Gearing — allow the player to customize the game to his or her liking. For instance, some people may prefer the quick reaction style of Gearing to the rapid button-smashing in the Speed method.

The Carl Lewis Challenge is a nicely executed simulation. It's more flexible than most games in this genre, with features that breathe life into what could have been a simple arcade game. The graphics are very well drawn and smoothly animated, and the multi-player option can be a lot of fun. In fact, the single drawback is that you only compete in five events — but then again that's all the events in which Carl competes.

GP



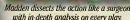
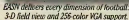
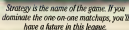
Wiggle the mouse from left to right to make your athlete run faster in the 100M Sprint.



The High Jump can be one of the harder events at first, but you'll quickly get the hang of it. The trick is to kick your legs out at just the right moment as you sail over the bar — this should give you a little more room.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse and joystick.

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all the subtle nuances, all the personality of the game itself. You'd expect that with up to 8 ratings per player, 35 players per team, 28 pro caliber teams, plus an All-Madden squad.

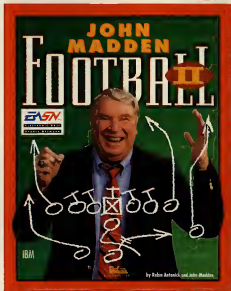
What you might not expect is how far inside football you get. Design your own plays. Or choose from Madden's new playbook packed with over 80 offensive and 100 defensive plays. Your game plan has to take into account every facet of the game: injuries, penalties, and, of course, the plan of the guy pacing the far sideline.

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GOBLIINS

STEPHEN POOLE

This delightful little puzzle game comes to the U.S. from Coktel Vision, a French software publisher whose products are distributed in the U.S. by Sierra On-Line. Despite the warning on the box — which says *Gobliins* "Contains hard puzzles for hard-core players!" — experienced problem-solvers will encounter only a couple of sticking points during the course of the game. But even though *Gobliins* is a bit on the short side, it's guaranteed fun from start to finish.

The title refers to three imps — Bobo, Dwayne, and Hooter — who have banded together for a special mission to restore peace to an unnamed land. Some mischievous subject is using a voodoo doll to ceaselessly torment the king, pricking him with pins, tickling him with feathers, and scaring him with spiders. You control the three "gobliins" as they try to find the wizard Niak and bring him to the castle to affect a cure.



You lose energy anytime Dwayne, Bobo, or Hooter are frightened by something.

Each goblin has a special power: Bobo can punch objects and climb ropes, Dwayne can pick up, carry, and use objects (only one item at a time, though), and Hooter can use his magic to transform things or move them. It might seem like a needlessly complex setup for a puzzle game, since you could assign all those powers to one fellow. But several puzzles are designed so that



The manual tells you that you need to retrieve the diamond at the far right, but the goal in many of the other puzzles isn't so clear.

you need two or three imps, and if you controlled only one character you'd miss the antics of the other two as they roll their eyes, shake their heads, and tap their feet in impatience.

Each game screen is an individual puzzle which must be solved before you can retrieve a valuable object and/or advance to the next screen. Make the wrong move, and an energy bar at the bottom of the screen is depleted; run out of energy, and you must enter a password or play the level over. The manual provides enough info to get you started, but often you're not sure just what it is you're supposed to do.

The first puzzle illustrates this perfectly. The three goblins, standing outside Niak's house, must find a pickaxe in order to unearth a diamond to exchange for admittance to the testy wizard's abode. Bobo punches an archway, causing a horn to fall from a buffalo's head; Dwayne picks up the horn and blows it, which makes a limb fall from a tree; then Hooter casts a magic spell on the limb, and *voilà!* — the limb becomes a pickaxe.

Of course, the puzzles get progressively harder, with up to 25 or 30 steps required to solve some of the more intricate problems. True, there are a couple of spots in the game that'll have you pounding your keyboard and pulling your hair, and novice or average puzzle fans could spend a fair amount of time getting to the end. But with only 22 screens in all, hard-core players will

feel that the challenge is over all too soon.

And one of the main reasons they'll be ready for more is the distinctive VGA artwork. The rich, vibrant colors perfectly match the cartoonlike mood of the game. Yes, it's low-res VGA, but the detail is more than satisfactory for this sort of game, and it looks as though the designers used all 256 colors on some of the busier screens!



Gobliins is attractive, addictive — and environmentally correct?? After chasing Niak all over the place, you discover that he's dumping fairy-tale toxins into the kingdom's water.

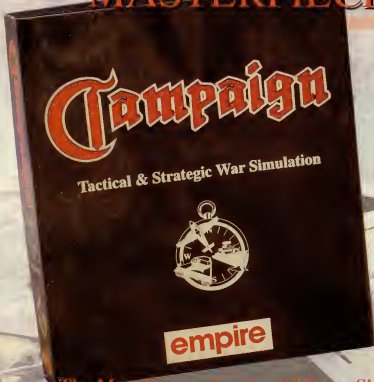
Sound support, however, is a different story. *Gobliins* has very few sound effects, and there's no music whatsoever. It could be argued that a musical score wouldn't add much to the game's depth, but it would be nice if there were ditties for the intro and finale screens.

Gobliins will probably retail for much less than Sierra's standard fare, and if that's the case you'll want to snatch this one up. Its intelligent design and cute good looks will hook you right from the start.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; supports AdLib, ProAudio Spectrum, and Sound Blaster sound cards; Supports mouse (recommended).

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FOLLOW THE READER

LESLIE MIZELL

Poor Sally, Dick, and Jane. Generations of children learned to read by following the escapades (if you could call them that) of these super-sweet tykes. Spot runs away. Puff sleeps on the television set. Dick and Jane go to school. Yawn.

But these generic paragons pale next to educational programs like *Follow the Reader*, an introductory-level reading program starring Mickey Mouse. Using bright graphics, great sound effects, and characters a lot more familiar to kids than Dick or Jane, Walt Disney Computer Software's *Follow the Reader* teaches preschool through first-grade children new words and basic sentence structure, as well as values such as friendship, good nutrition, pet care, and ecological awareness.

Kids use a point-and-click interface to build sentences which take Mickey through an average mouse-day. After he wakes up, for example, he might play with a yo-yo, wash the dishes, climb into his tree house, call up his buddies, make sandwiches, build a kite, cycle to the beach, collect trash, then head back home for an evening with a book. There are



A day at the beach might include surfing, building a sand castle, or listening to the ocean—or some other oddball things—in a shell.

dozens of choices to make, and it's very easy to scroll through the different options. Once a story is completed and Mickey's gone to sleep, it's possible to print out the entire story, including illustrations to color.

Exploration of Mickey's world has no time limit; kids can spend as much or as little time in Mickey's house, the park, or the beach as they want. And there's absolutely no frustration involved—there's no way a child can do anything wrong.

Once a selection is made, a low-voiced, enthusiastic (but not gushing) female reads the sentence while Mickey performs the action. Seeing, then hearing, the sentences should help children learn difficult words such as "vacuum" and "laundry," as well as reinforce familiar favorites like "pizza," "spaghetti," and "telephone."



Some of the woodland animals in the park look like they may be visiting from other Disney productions.

Follow the Reader has a few minor shortcomings. For one thing, Mickey's the only character who does anything. Pluto makes occasional appearances, and you can feed him until he should be ready to bust. You can also phone Goofy or invite Minnie or Donald (not both) over for the day. But none of these characters do anything but follow you around; in fact, Minnie just stands there and simps—rodent or not, she's not a great role model.

Another thing is that the program is a bit on the short side. There are 11 different screens in *Follow the Reader*—five in the house, two outside the house, three at the park, and one at the beach. Youngsters will probably get plenty of mileage out of these locales, but older kids and more advanced readers might start wishing for a few new sites.

Still, *Follow the Reader* is definitely worth the purchase price. An afternoon interacting with Mickey won't replace sitting in Mom or Dad's lap with a book, but it's far and away better than a few hours of television.

GP



Mickey can call Minnie, Donald, or Goofy for a chat.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA, EGA, or Tandy 16-color graphics; hard drive; supports most sound cards and the Disney Sound source; supports mouse (recommended).

Don Bluth Multimedia Presents

DRAGON'S LAIR III: THE CURSE OF MORDREAD



After destroying the evil wizard Mordroc in his bid for marriage to your beloved Daphne in *Dragon's Lair II: Time Warp*, his sister, the evil witch Mordread, is demanding revenge. You, as Dirk the Daring, must test your skills as you are thrust into a frantic quest through time to save Daphne and the children before they are trapped forever in the Vortex of Eternity.

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CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

LESLIE MIZELL

Out of the blue — like a surprise witness at a murder trial — comes *Cruise for a Corpse* from U.S. Gold, a mystery game that gives *Laura Bow* a run for her money. Developed by Delphine Software, *Cruise for a Corpse* employs the same Cinematique system used in *Out of This World*, making *Cruise* one of the most playable mysteries around.

The story is a traditional whodunit. Industrialist Niklos Karaboudjan invites some friends on a Mediterranean cruise, but is repaid for his hospitality by being murdered the first night at sea. As Inspector Raoul Dusentier, it's your job to track down the killer; the suspects range from Karaboudjan's priest to his accountant.

In this very logical game, you don't search every nook and cranny solving puzzles within puzzles. Instead, you question a suspect, then use that character's answers to move immediately to another person or location. It's not until the mystery's almost unraveled that it becomes necessary to wander around waiting for something to happen.

Moving about the ship is a simple matter of accessing a map and clicking on your destination, and mouse-based



Some of the cutaway screens are quite dramatic.

menus make it easy to question suspects. These two features make the game extremely quick and user-friendly — a pleasant change of pace from the cumbersome interface in *The Dagger of Amn Ra*.

Nonetheless, there are annoying aspects to the game. You can only get certain answers if you question suspects in a particular room, and you must occasionally repeat questions as the game progresses. The inspector seems indifferent about possible evi-



If you get stuck after the attempt on Dick's life, wander around the deck. Some of the passengers have suspicions to share with you.

denors and colors that only vaguely resemble those of the objects on-screen, it's hard to excuse the two separate entries you must make every time you play — and each entry may contain up to four icons. It's almost enough to make you leave *Cruise* up and running all the way to the finish.

Once you've delved into the mystery, however, you'll find *Cruise* intriguing, well-constructed, and inventive. And even though you never really find out why those grenades are in the hold, you'll be glad you played.



In other mysteries, a childhood souvenir may point toward mental disturbance. But check this music box for a secret compartment instead.

dence, too; there may be something stuck in a drain, for example, but he's not about to waste time finding out what it is. And what's the meaning of the cryptic message "There's no razor this time" when you search a trash can? There never was a razor — not in this repertoire or any other!

But those complaints are nothing compared to the horrendous copy-protection code wheel. Even if you make allowances for its tiny windows



Are these the quarters of a butler with 20 years' service? Perhaps there's more to this servant-boss relationship than meets the eye.



Like any good mystery movie, *Cruise for a Corpse* features black-and-white flashbacks.

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; 16-color VGA, MCGA, or EGA graphics; hard drive recommended; supports Roland and AdLib sound cards; mouse recommended.

GP

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INTERNATIONAL SPORTS CHALLENGE

RUSS CECCOLA

It was only a few years ago that Epyx was in full swing with its popular multi-event titles, from *World Games* to *California Games*. Prompted by Epyx's success, many competitors rushed to market with sports games of their own — some very good, others pretty poor.

Now, in the aftermath of the Barcelona '92 Olympics, we're seeing something of a resurgence PC sports titles. At first glance, *Empire Simulation's International Sports Challenge (ISC)* looked like another Epyx-style spinoff that players didn't need. Instead, *ISC* will hold its own long after Barcelona '92 with interesting events never before presented on the PC, and an overall quality and sense of fun missing from many of the competitors' products.

It's more fun than solo play because after executing a great dive or an outstanding display of marksmanship you have the added reward of the look of dismay on the other players' faces. Still, the events are absorbing even if you're playing alone.

Diving is the most ambitious event of the package. To perform a dive, you use the joystick to move a dot around an outer circle, trying to follow a guiding dot in an inner circle. Follow it closely, and the computer will execute the tucks, spins, and flips. You play from a side-view while diving, swimming, and running the marathon, while the other events are shown from a first-



The polygon graphics in the cycling events make for smooth game play, a must in this fast-paced event.

person perspective. Swimming and the marathon are joystick-intensive events, as you move the stick back and forth in a rhythmic motion. Cycling and show jumping use a similar first-person perspective, with a rider's view

a wider variety of play. You can put them together in any combination, leaving out those events that you just don't enjoy or can't master. Graphics and sound effects in *ISC* are quite good. The graphics are most impressive in the events with a first-person perspective, but the detail is consistent throughout the game. The movement of the horse's head in show jumping makes you feel like you're really there. (Show jumping and cycling use polygon graphics for backgrounds, but all other scenes are bitmapped.) Sound effects and music serve as introductions to events and rewards for good performance.

ISC is a nice surprise. The events have something for everyone and they're lots of fun. A thoughtful touch is *Empire's* inclusion of cycling, one of the newest Olympic sports. As a bonus, the documentation explores the history of each competition, and describes the rules and strategy for success in the real-life counterparts to the events. *International Sports Challenge* is a great choice for group play, and it's satisfying enough to work for solo gamers as well.

GP



Diving is the most ambitious event in *International Sports Challenge*. A dot on an inner ring of concentric circles indicates the direction to move the joystick.

ISC offers six events: diving, shooting, show jumping, cycling, swimming, and the marathon. Each of the events requires a good joystick and nimble fingers (though it's better to use the mouse for the shooting events). You can link the games into one six-event challenge or practice one event by itself. *ISC* supports up to four players, and I strongly suggest human competition —

from atop the cycle or horse. The tight angles and numerous obstacles in show jumping give you an appreciation of this demanding event, while cycling is more of an endurance event, with the main goal just to keep the cyclist moving and on the course.

Each of the six events has sub-options (board heights in diving, courses for show jumping, etc.), giving the game

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA or MCGA graphics; hard drive recommended; supports all major sound cards; mouse and joystick recommended.

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ULTIMATE CHALLENGE GOLF

BRIAN CARROLL

If someone were to tell you that they'd been working on a software package for more than a decade, your expectations would swell, wouldn't they? Friendly Software claims its product, *Ultimate Challenge Golf*, required 15 years of development and underwent 75 formal revisions.

Maybe they should have gone for 16 years and a 76th version.

The game does boast a few selling points, but the hype in the game manual sets standards no software package could hope to attain. Billed by its developers as "the world's finest and most thoroughly advanced computer golf simulation," *Ultimate Challenge Golf* has "accomplished what no previous computer simulation has done" before, according to its overly bold instructional manual.

Towners of *Links 386 Pro*, the golf package generally accepted as "the world's finest," *Ultimate Challenge Golf's* bravado should come as quite a surprise. Granted, it is a solid

presentation on the elements of course management. But in terms of realism, playability, and

graphic brilliance, *Links 386 Pro's* reign as top golf simulation appears more than safe for quite some time.

Once you wade past the manual's self-adulation and tales of superhuman development efforts, there's certainly merit to be found. For one thing, *Ultimate Challenge Golf* is a fine teaching tool regarding almost every decision required of a golfer.

Once you input your



To experiment with your real-world golf game, evaluate yourself in the eight dimensions listed.

own perceived tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses—including fading or drawing, underhitting or overhitting—the game will tax your acumen in accounting for the multiplicity of influences that affect each and every golf shot. Wind, temperature, precipitation, course condition, club selection, spin, power, coursespeed, terrain, lie, and breaks all affect your shots in realistic fashion.

In addition, *Ultimate Challenge Golf* helps you analyze the different aspects of your game. Using the graphic demonstration of your game in action, you can figure out how to emphasize the strengths while compensating for the weak points. For instance, let's say you consistently hook your drives and long irons, but are very strong when it comes to long irons, chipping, and putting. Also, let's say you put a topspin on the ball when you'd rather be applying a backspin for bite on the greens. The set-up process would also take this into account.

Ultimate Challenge Golf takes this customized information and uses it to simulate your shot-making on one of the two courses available (neither of which are actual courses). By illustrating your golf game, the program lets you experiment without expending all of the time, money, and patience required out there on a real course. A controlled experiment such as this has its real-world limitations, of course, but it is a great way to experiment with new techniques.

So what would a 16th year

of development yield, and what should be included in the 76th version? Better graphics, for starters, along with the addition of an ingredient necessary for an entertaining round of PC linksmanship—interaction. *Ultimate Challenge Golf* doesn't give you the chance to actually play a round.

The manual tries to preempt this criticism by saying, "We don't believe that a finger can accurately simulate a golf swing." There is no swing meter or power gauge, no taps of the space bar, joystick, or mouse buttons. You simply feed in the required data before each shot and then watch the computer execute it, thereby effectively reducing your role to that of a glorified caddy.

While it may be true that pressing a mouse button cannot simulate an actual golf swing, it sure beats simply watching. After all, golf is a game of concentration, focus, and yes, hand-eye coordination. The interactive element of most golf packages includes all those elements, at least to some degree. But in *Ultimate Challenge Golf*, you simply choose a club and determine shot direction—that's it.

As for graphics, *Ultimate Challenge Golf* is surprisingly primitive, especially considering the brilliant color and incredible detail that's possible these days. It's difficult to do very much with a 16-color palette at a resolution of 320x200, but it doesn't bode well for a 1992 release when the first thing that comes to mind when viewing it is the old arcade game *Birdie King*.

Ultimate Challenge Golf does several things well, but offering an interactive gaming challenge isn't one of them.

GP



Ultimate Challenge Golf will let you know when you've ventured beyond the realm of club selection. If the risk is moderate, the warning will appear in yellow. If severe, the warning will be red.

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA or EGA graphics.

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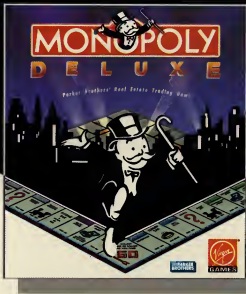
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CYBER EMPIRES

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

This expand-and-conquer game from SSI pits the player against up to four human or computer-controlled opponents for the domination of the giant planet of Orion. Armies are composed of self-propelled cyborgs equipped with various types of armament and protection.

Each side starts out with a certain amount of funds. In order to claim control over a country, you must first occupy it, then purchase a capital; in order to manufacture cyborgs, you must purchase a factory. The larger and more productive a factory is, the greater its cost. Your income depends on how many cities and provinces you control (i.e., occupy with your capitals). Small factories can produce more cyborgs, and produce them more cheaply, through the use of enhancements — very expensive, but worth their cost in terms of long-range strategy.

There are three types of game to choose from. In the Strategy Campaign, you're concerned solely with making and maneuvering your cyborg armies — actual combat is resolved by the computer. Taken by itself, this strategic game is actually quite enjoyable up to the point of combat, but it then fails to deliver the goods. In this mode, all combat takes

place literally behind closed doors, with a great armored panel covering the screen. You see the results of the battle statistically, but the lack of animated battle sequences is enough to leave you feeling cheated.

In the Complete Campaign mode, however, you actually take control of cyborg units and lead them into battle. The animated cyborgs are



The animated cyborgs are varied and delightful.

adorably cute, and the various missile and ray-gun effects are just dandy. But these battles are presented by means of a close-up split-screen view which lets you see only a few square meters of terrain at a time, making it very hard to deploy your cyborgs so the terrain works in their favor. Moreover, the battles take place at such a breakneck pace (at least on my 386/40) that it's almost impossible to plan coherent tactics against the adversary.

There is probably no alternative to the split-screen format when the battles are fought between two human opponents, but a single panoramic view of the battlefield would greatly have improved gameplay in the human-vs.-computer mode.

You can also fight individual duels, in the Tactical Battle mode — very good for honing your skills and perfecting tactics. While the bigger and more expensive cyborgs are impressive, they are also ponderously slow and can often be destroyed by faster, lighter machines.

Unfortunately, the single player must again cope with a split-screen view, and about the only good thing we can say about it is that you get used to

it in time. Still, it remained slightly obnoxious no matter how many games we played.



Cyber Empires has the potential to be a good strategy game, if only the designers would let us see the battles take place.

Other players may not mind so much. Certainly Cyber Empires offers plenty of action and firepower, in its arcade modes. The strategic game, too, is pretty good in and of itself, but the lack of on-screen combat resolution is a serious handicap.

GP



In the Strategy campaign, this is what you see instead of an animated battle sequence.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse and joystick.

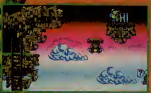
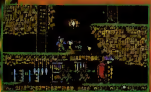
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Screen shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game.
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AIR FORCE COMMANDER

JEFF SEIKEN

The Persian Gulf War was arguably the first war decided by air power alone. As if to emphasize the point, here comes *Air Force Commander* (AFC), a strategic-level simulation of aerial warfare in the modern Middle East. In AFC, the armies on the ground cease to exist; instead, conflicts among nations are treated as something for their air forces to resolve.

The game is published by Impressions, a U.K.-based publisher with a new U.S. office. While many of their earlier import titles were lacking in quality, AFC marks a fresh beginning for Impressions. It's the flagship release in a new and wide-ranging line of strategy games under development at the company's new Connecticut office. As the first title out of the chute, AFC bodes well for future Impressions releases.

Among other things, AFC puts to rest any lingering notions that war games are inherently plodding, lifeless affairs. Game play takes place in real time, racing along at a fairly blistering pace. Because almost all of the 14 scenarios take place within a very confined geographical area, flight times between base and target are usually brief. In most games, you can expect the first wave of enemy bombers to come roaring into your air space within 15 seconds of the start. From there, the tempo only accelerates. AFC is an in-

tense game, one that keeps you busy thinking, planning, acting, and reacting.

Fortunately, the point-and-click interface enables you to toggle quickly between the game's many different screens. Most of the game is played from the radar map, which displays the location of friendly and enemy aircraft, as well as ground installations. The bottom of the screen contains the aircraft data display; clicking on this brings you to the mission screen, where you can assign orders to individual squadrons.

The more familiar you become with the game environment, the more impressed you'll be by its sensible construction. However, even the excellent interface can't save the largest scenarios from becoming unwieldy. Part of the problem stems from the lack of any screen providing you with a complete order of battle for the scenario you're playing. The absence of place names or any other kinds of identifying labels on the radar map adds to the difficulties. In the heat of battle, it's all too easy to wind up completely disoriented, especially when you're trying to coordinate the actions of 60 squadrons stationed at a dozen airbases scattered across four countries.

Other than this, *Air Force Commander* provides little to complain about and a lot to applaud. Play tends to be fast and furious, as both sides in a scenario must mount aggressive campaigns in order to win. This often leads to a situation akin to a boxing match in which the two fighters simultaneously try for a knockout blow. But victory is not a matter of outslugging the enemy. Careful planning and execution are required if you hope to do more than trade punches in



The communications screen supplies a running update on the progress of the war and the overall prospects for victory.

a ruinous war of attrition.

Despite its overenthusiastic claim to being a "sophisticated simulation," AFC is not a hardcore war game along the lines of *Harpoon* or *Carrier Strike*. Realism and accuracy take a decided backseat to playability and abstraction in this product. Perhaps the most jarring example of how AFC favors simplicity over authenticity is the fact that the game system permits only one plane from a squadron to be airborne at any given time.

But even if some of the specifics in *Air Force Commander* fly in the face of reality, the game gets things right in a general sense. Thus, after a few sessions with AFC, you'll admire the deadliness of the F-16 Falcon, appreciate the versatility of multi-purpose aircraft like the F-15, and understand the overarching importance of radar in aerial warfare.

Give Impressions credit for *Air Force Commander*. The game demonstrates not only Impressions' willingness to tackle topics outside the wargaming mainstream, but also its ability to do so in entertaining and provocative style. "easy" mode.

GP



A Soviet-built strike plane makes a bombing run against a civilian installation outside of Jerusalem.

Hardware requirements: 640K RAM; VGA graphics; supports AdLib and Sound Blaster sound cards; mouse recommended.

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TANDY MAKES SPLASH IN CONSUMER MARKET

Tandy Corporation, owner of the Radio Shack chain of electronics stores, announced new products that put the company in the front ranks of hardware manufacturers producing multimedia and CD-ROM systems.

In late August, Tandy announced The Sensation, a 25-MHz 486 multimedia PC system aimed at the home and classroom user. The hardware includes 4 megabytes of RAM, a 3.5-inch 1.44 MB floppy drive, a 107-megabyte IDE hard disk, Tandy's proprietary Multimedia Palette chip (with 16-million color display capability), a CD-

ROM drive with 375-ms average access time, digital stereo sound, as well as a voice-mail system and fax/modem (2400 bps). The Sensation comes bundled with MS-DOS 5.0, Windows 3.1, Microsoft Works for Windows (multimedia version), Microsoft Bookshelf for Windows, and several telecommunications programs for popular online services. The unit has a suggested retail price of \$1,995.00.

Shortly after The Sensation's introduction, Tandy unveiled its Video Information System (VIS), a stand-alone CD-based video system that plugs into TV sets and stereo units, and is operated by a wireless remote control. The new VIS



Video Information System (VIS)

format has enlisted the software support of more than 50 entertainment and educational software publishers. VIS players are available in units sold by Tandy (under the Memorex name) and Zenith, while other well-known hardware manufacturers are reportedly about to sign on. The unit ships with Compton's Multimedia Encyclopedia, and has a suggested retail price of \$700.00.



The Sensation

MOVING AND SHAKING

MicroProse has purchased Paragon Software, a veteran computer game publishing company, located in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. MicroProse, based in Hunt Valley, Maryland, has been marketing and distributing Paragon's products since 1988, and now intends to make Paragon its first satellite development group. The acquisition gives MicroProse an entree into the CD-ROM market (Paragon's *Mantis* is due out shortly on CD-ROM), and a broader base in the fantasy role-playing category. Also, MicroProse plans to add Paragon's titles to its European sales and distribution channels.

As of October 1, MicroProse has a 900 hint-line service. Users can access the line at any hour or day by calling 1-900-933-PLAY. The new service lets the caller choose from six game

categories — strategy, role playing, animated graphic adventure, simulation, Nintendo, and sports. All 1992 MicroProse titles plus a number of its more popular older titles, such as *Railroad Tycoon*, are supported by the hint line. The cost of the service is 95 cents per minute.

Veteran educational software publisher Davidson & Associates announced Lawrence Productions as the newest member of its affiliated-label program. Lawrence Productions has published several high-quality award-winning titles in recent years, including the *McGer* series, *Katie's Farm*, and *Nigel's World*. Davidson will market and distribute all Lawrence Productions titles.

As a result of its new alliance with Krisalis Software of England, MicroLeague Sports has a new name: MicroLeague Interactive Software. In an ef-

fort to expand beyond its traditional sports-only lineup, MicroLeague will soon be releasing two new Krisalis titles in the U.S.: *Laser Squad*, a five-mission strategy game in which the player acts as a commando unit leader, and *Safe Cracker*, a puzzle game originally titled *Revelation* in the European market, where it sold very well. As part of the agreement between the companies, Krisalis will be distributing and selling MicroLeague products in Europe.

Electronic Arts has signed six CD-ROM publishers to its affiliated-label program. Upcoming CD-ROM titles from Ebook, Humongous Entertainment, ICOM Simulations, NovaLogic, Pop Rocket, and Zelos! will be channeled through Electronic Arts Distribution.

ELECTRONIC ARTS BUYS ORIGIN

In one of the computer game industry's biggest surprise moves of the year, Electronic Arts purchased Origin Systems. In early September, Electronic Arts, based in San Mateo, California, exchanged approximately 1.3 million shares for all outstanding securities of Origin. The value of the deal is estimated to be about \$35 million.

Origin will maintain its own corporate identity and its Austin, Texas, headquarters, and will operate as a wholly owned subsidiary of Electronic Arts.

Origin's founders, Robert and Richard Garriott, will continue in their positions as president and CEO, and senior vice-president and creative director, respectively. Also, the brothers have new corporate titles under Electronic Arts — Robert Garriott is a vice-president, and Richard is an executive producer.

Representatives from both companies, two of the strongest in the industry, seem pleased with the new alliance in terms of long-term strategies that no doubt involve Origin's proprietary development technologies, EA's distribution strength, and a mutual interest in the young CD software market.

WINTER CES: NEW FACES

The 1993 Winter Consumer Electronics Show, to be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, January 7-10, announced that Apple Computer and Motorola will exhibit for the first time in the show's 25-year history. Companies returning to CES after an absence of several years include Sony, Yamaha, RCA, and Mitsubishi.

ON THE HORIZON

LucasArts upcoming game, *X-Wing*, promises to introduce several new software technologies when it debuts in the weeks ahead. The game is based on the *Star Wars* movies and features space battles between the Rebel Alliance and the Empire. Co-developed by Lawrence Holland (*Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* and *Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain*), *X-Wing* involves com-



LucasArts promises several new technologies in *X-Wing*.

bat action, strategy, and varying modes of difficulty. The 3-D flight engine for the game is an integration of polygon and bitmap technologies, combined to render a high level of detail and special lighting effects.

A new proprietary story engine, dubbed Landru by LucasArts, was developed by Edward Kilham, *X-Wing*'s other co-developer. The storyline is nonlinear. Digitized speech and sound effects from the *Star Wars* films are used in the game. LucasArts plans to include with the *X-Wing* package a special 96-page companion book that includes key technical information that will help users. Also in the works are at least two Space Combat Tour supplementary disks, scheduled for release shortly after *X-Wing* ships.

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Superior Sound Simplified

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Accolade has recently released the first add-on disk for Jack Nicklaus Golf & Course Design: Signature Edition. Featuring two courses—The Links of Muirfield in Scotland (site of the recent British Open) and Muirfield Village Golf Club in Ohio (site of Nicklaus' annual Memorial Tournament)—Jack Nicklaus Signature Tour Volume 1 carries a suggested retail price of \$24.95.

New add-on disks for *Hardball III* are now available from Accolade. The *Hardball III MLBPA Players Disk* features digitized color photos of real major league players as well as their stats through mid-season 1992. The *Big League Ballpark Disk* offers the remaining 18 major league stadiums (8 parks were included with *Hardball III*) as well as additional season schedules, including games for the two expansion teams. Each add-on disk has a suggested retail price of \$24.95.



Accolade's MLBPA Disklets gamers add 650 real major-league players to *Hardball III*.

Harpoon fans will be interested in *Three-Sixty's* early fall release of the *Harpoon Designers' Series*. This add-on disk offers up to 12 new scenarios for each of the four separately available *BattleSets*. Reflecting recent changes in world geopolitics, the *Designers' Series* disk also includes a variety of new aircraft, ships, and submarines, as well as other enhancements.



Patriot boasts highly detailed Super VGA graphics.

Three-Sixty is also planning a mid-November release date for *Patriot*, a land-based war game featuring 20 scenarios (one in the Persian Gulf) which was developed in conjunction with the Game Designer's Workshop.

Look for *Caesar* from Impressions in early January. In this historical strategy game, the player starts as a low-rank-

goal is to rise through the ranks to Caesar. A separately purchased *Cohort 2* disk offers battles between the Roman legion and barbarian hordes. Caesar is expected to retail at \$59.95.

ASCIIware's *Dominus*, a hybrid game combining FRP, action, war, and strategy elements, is due out in early 1993. In *Dominus*, the player, as ruler



A variety of game genres are combined in *Dominus*.

ing province ruler with a piece of scrubland on which he must build a city populated by forums, baths, houses, factories, coliseums, etc. If the player demonstrates sufficient ability, he is promoted to overseeing new lands and facing much greater challenges. The ultimate

of a kingdom under siege, must build an army by creating custom warriors from ghouls, monsters, and other creatures. Through muscle, sword, magic, healing, and so on, the player must defend against blood-thirsty invaders. Suggested retail price is \$59.95.

NovaLogic, a California-based company that produces technologically ambitious game titles, is close to completion on *Comanche: Maximum Overkill*. This helicopter combat simulation (based on the Boeing Sikorsky Comanche RAH-66 Attack Helicopter) employs several proprietary 3-D and graphics technologies to achieve fluid play and fast frame rates. *Comanche* is designed for play on faster machines (no slower than a 16-MHz 386), and really shines on 486 computers. If the game looks and plays like the demo we saw, watch out—*Comanche* could be an exciting jolt forward in the simulation category.

Look for a surprise title this fall from Spectrum HoloByte. *National Lampoon's Chessmeister 5 Billion and One* is a spoof of several of the popular chess titles on the market, although it's a fully functional, multilevel chess game. Spectrum tells us that *Lampoon's* editors are involved in the game's design, and that a great deal of work is going into the game's graphics, which include rotoscoped video images.

By early spring, Spectrum plans to release a air-combat sim based on the English two-seater Tornado fighter plane.



They've signed an exclusive distribution agreement with the developer, U.K.-based Digital Integration, for U.S. rights to the game.

Comanche boasts optimal use of 386/486 processors—and promises a one-minute learning curve.

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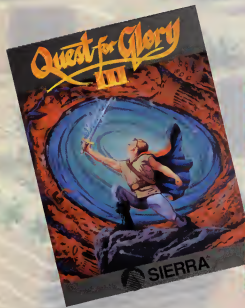
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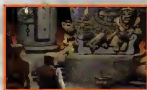


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